

A romantic sunset scene with a glowing heart and silhouettes of a couple. The background is a dark sky with a bright sun or moon in the upper center. In the foreground, the silhouettes of a man and a woman are visible, sitting together. A large, glowing heart shape is superimposed over the couple, with a bright light at its base. The overall mood is romantic and nostalgic.

Every Time
She
Falls

Short prose and poems on falling in love and falling apart

Sarra Edwards

68 Days

68 days until the word *veteran*
becomes tangible.

It's not old men
telling tales of the Viet Cong
or really old men
remembering a World War.

It's you.

At 27, you'll be placed in that category
of PTSD and the past.

Yes, your body aches from service and
explosions and
the things you can't say during the day.

But ask a room of people
about their connotations of
veteran and their words
won't align with
you, in 68 days. You, in 68 days,
finding your place in a spectrum
that cannot support or soothe your soul.

You, tangible,
in 68 days, will stand in front of me
and I will soothe
and I will support.

Not because
my connotations of *veteran*
are vastly different.

And not because
I can understand
the things you can't say during the day.

But because it's you.
You, in 68 days.

That Next Dance

So, this Canadian girl walks into a country western bar in Japan. It sounds like the beginning of a bad – and potentially inappropriate – joke. But if it's a joke, then you're the punchline, slamming into my heart with that first chord. It's not a joke, though. It is what really, truly happened on February 2nd, 2012.

So, this Canadian girl walks into a country western bar in Japan. There are flags for every state, a mechanical bull to be ridden by drunken Marines, and an earnest man

who will teach her how to dance. It will be many months before he tells her that he would like to hold her outside of a two-step. He does, though, and he will.

She will love the way the music starts and he is there, holding his hand out in an unspoken invitation. She will love him like she loves the way her feet slide across that large wooden floor, an inherent smoothness. She will love him, always waiting for that next dance.

My Name

My grandmother called me Sarah. Substitute teachers did too. They'd call out my name during attendance and the whole class would chorus, "It's SAR-ra!" My parents say they corrected my grandma for the first few years of my life but ultimately they succumbed to her inability to correctly pronounce my seemingly foreign name.

Our names are a present given to us by our parents. Later, we give them to our lovers.

It all comes down to the way you hold it between your lips. I am sitting on your couch and saying something presumably ridiculous just so you will look at me and say my name in that way you do, with a small smile and so much love.

Close to Boys in Cars

Mocha knows he's coming before I do. The rumbling muffler of that Chevy truck sends my dog into a frenzy. She loves him before I do, too. Purchased for 900 dollars, this truck is the only thing my 16-year-old boyfriend spends more time with than me. Piled in the back are blankets and pillows and it is the perfect sleep-under-the-stars vehicle. He sets the speakers on the roof and we crawl in the back and talk to the moon. This boy, this truck, this place in time, are vividly recalled many years later. I can remember the lights, the colours, the love in that boy, that car, that howl of my dog. I remember how it feels to be close to boys in cars.

Grandfather, Part 1

When we arrive in Kamloops, I rush through the door and you swing me in the air and laugh at all the energy I have built up in the 5-hour car ride. Later, I will sit on your lap and you will ask me if my ears are made of chocolate. Holding your hands behind your back, you tell me to pick ... but there's a prize in each hand and I'm always a winner with you. You send me home with coins from the 1800s, gifts that I will give to my own grandchildren someday. The taste of sweet, canned pears lingers in my mouth when we

drive away after the long weekend and I clutch the coin in my tiny fist, fierce and tight as your love for me.

Grandfather, Part 2

we saw the house,
the trees, the pool
and you suddenly knew me.
all that i am
lives in those windows,
branches and water.
they created me,
how can i not belong to them?

turning the corner, all of a sudden i am crying
for a flying fox
and a fireman's pole,
pebbles in my shoes
and the wrinkled hand that
held my own as we
walked around my childhood.

now it is you holding my hand
telling me it's okay to cry
for a swingset and
a metal tyrannosaurus rex;

but it's not them i cry for
but the subtext of him that
they would whisper
into my chocolate ears.

The First Boy I Loved (Who Didn't Break My Heart)

In the summer before my last semester of university, the two main consumers of my time were my full-time job at a chocolate shop and misery. In June, I spent my days selling candy apples to American tourists and my evenings clicking the Stumble button

on the toolbar of my web browser. Stumbleupon, which led me to Couch Surfing, which led me to him.

He was my first Couch Surfer: a lanky Irishman, with long hair pulled back in a pirate ponytail and the habit of rolling his own cigarettes. While only intending to stay at my apartment for 1 night, he moved into my bed for 2 weeks and into my heart for much, much longer.

On my lunch breaks, he brought two boxes of Noodle Box rice; we sat in the Bay Centre, watching people and each other. Our second night together, we began a game of Truth and for the next two weeks, he knew me better than many that came before. On Salt Spring Island, we watched Raffi sing the songs of my childhood and in Vancouver, we sat on the steps of the Art Gallery, knowing we would never see each other again.

He ended up back in Ireland in August; with the time difference, he commented, I wish I was falling asleep with you or you were getting up with me.

I really miss you, he said; then, he got back on a plane for America.

In September, I went back to school; in September, I yearned for his eccentricities, which seemed genuine, instead of the counterfeit idiosyncrasies that the people around me seemed to be perpetrating. I ached for the passion that existed in his words and actions, in the way he kissed the crease of my arm or cooked me dinner with quinoa and mushrooms I'd never noticed at Fairway. And then he came back to me for one more week.

Things were Different (the price of rice had gone up; the weather was colder) but the secrets he told me and the way he kissed my neck still made my face and feet and fingers tingle.

When he left again, I wrote the Couch Surfing review that I could never leave him, a recommendation to the world for the only man I've ever loved who didn't break my heart.

It seems absurd that Stumbleupon led me to you. At first, an Internet connection; suddenly, curled in an arm chair (better suited for a library than my living room). You are significant. Every moment is like the look on your face when the clerk at Tim Horton's gives you an old 5-dollar bill. I like you even when you are throwing up in my toilet, which probably isn't a sentiment suited for romantic prose, but that doesn't matter because it's true. And I say, in a moment of epiphany and drunken-ness that you are the kind of person to be shared. I mean ... you are meaningful. Someone asks if I love you and when I say no, I realize that I am lying. I love everything about you. Perhaps not in the expected way, but never mind. I love recognizing that you will do the thing that you most want to do (change the world). And if I had to remember you within one

moment, summarize your significance, it would be *that good morning*. And it doesn't matter if you know which one.

Bittersweet

the taste of chocolate
lingers in my mouth
as you lie beside me.

bittersweet. you kiss me
and ask "remember love?"
i smile and shake my head.

you were always
preexistent. talking of
gods i never knew.

looking at pictures
we see places to
visit in our dreams.

in japan i'll wear
a kimono, with
blue flowers and gold thread.

in italy we float
down a street, me
in a dress of darkness.

sometimes you leave me
for your created gods
and i understand loneliness.

you toast me with sweet wine
in my red dress
that brings you back.

some nights i sleep in my dress
when you come back
and remind me.

The Blended Family Chronicles, Part I

I don't know of any girl who grows up thinking, "I really want to be a stepmom when I get older!" And it's not just the "wicked stepmother" stereotype that is deeply engrained in our culture.

It is missed firsts.

It's coming second.

It is balance and compromise like nothing else.

It is a risk.

Ah, but life is full of risk. And if you don't risk anything, you risk even more.

In 2015, in the course of 4 weeks, I moved from a small trailer in the middle of nowhere, where I lived only with my dog and my ever-growing baby bump, to a home in the city with my fiancé, his son (every second week) and, shortly after, our newborn baby. Less than a year later, our niece moved in with us.

It was (and still is) a life of huge adjustments, daily learning, and uncomfortable growth.

It is more laundry in a week than I used to do in a month. It is structure and routine and sports practices, when I, not so long ago, could binge-watch an entire Netflix series in a weekend. It is conversations at midnight about our parenting and whether we're doing a good job.

Fellow stepmoms - if you are feeling overwhelmed (or know that you will feel those feelings again) - hang in there. It's not easy, but you are strong and capable.

Our family is built on risk and change and growth. It's not perfect, but it is worth it.

Today Is Not That Day

There is a feeling she gets; it usually lasts only an evening. In the morning, she goes back to pretending she is always happy here. And while she leads a nearly-perfect and possibly-charmed life, this feeling - a knotted sense of something she can never articulate, almost like nerves with no real purpose - has followed her past sunrise.

She lived with this feeling for months, once. December 13th, 2005. A boy broke her heart one week before her eighteenth birthday. Since then, it has been an ache with no name and a hunger for something she cannot possibly have. It's the teenage feeling she

always expected to outgrow; but today is not that day. Today, her insides are tied and today she knows what she wants but she also knows that today is not the day she will get it. She knows her life, in reality, is neither perfect nor charmed.

She's been reading The Consolation of Philosophy, Boethius, and he says something that Dante and every other writer will reiterate until the end of time. "In all adversity of fortune, the most wretched kind is once to have been happy."

Yes, that is the feeling. And there is one person who can untie these knots, shake these purposeless nerves, and feed that hunger. But today is not that day.

Strawberry Stains

her mouth is stained red
strawberry snow
like she's been kissing
mouth pressed hard against
a lover
or a stranger
or perhaps a boy whose
alcohol words put him somewhere
in between

but she hasn't.
Instead, it's the
sickly sweet syrup
that's making love
with her lips,
stains of something
almost passionate.

The Love of My Life (So Far)

This is something I have written numerous times; every time, it changes slightly, because you and I are always shifting, aren't we, moving, varying in the words we say to each other and what emotions we are willing to express.

We met by accident. It is something we do not attempt to define, but accept like a child's notion of Heaven. If I believed in Fate, that is what I would call it, but we make our own

destiny. On our second date, you cook for me. As I am leaving, you grab my wrist, pull me in, and kiss me.

Flash-forward: It is the end of November. Sometime in July, you ended it; I moved to Victoria and you moved to Edmonton. My apartment is tinsel-ed and stocking-ed, with a miniature Christmas tree in the corner of the already crowded space. Peppermint candles are burning, with wax pooling on an old plate I purchased at a garage sale in the summer. The tinsel over the fireplace is reflecting pools of light on the roof above my head when the phone rings and it is your voice on the other end of the line. I am curled with my computer in the most comfortable bed with the most comforting voice in my ear.

Even if you are one hour ahead of me and one thousand three hundred and ten kilometres away, your words slip between the sheets and I remember the feeling of our tangled feet. Your words are a sensationalized picture on the screen at the drive-in theatre, where we sat in my Pontiac, sipping smuggled-in Bailey's from plastic cups. Captioned like a commercial: Let Your Senses Guide You. Movies are irrelevant at the drive-in, as the concept itself is almost extinct. We come back for the captivating atmosphere, which addicts us with its cheap thrills and steamy windows. It is the illicit activity that resounds of high school hormones, the prohibited booze and indulgence of skin on skin on skin.

Back to the phone call. We talk about school (me), work (you), friends (both), and the Toronto Maple Leafs (I mock your favourite team's 5-1 defeat). When I hang up, eventually, the candles have burned out; wax is spilling onto the table in a swirl of blues and greens.

Flashback: you meet me after class and I am overwhelmed by History, with a capital H. Facts of world war Death and Destruction have left me disconcerted and I hand you the keys. Spring slush overflows into sneakers and socks are soaked down to the skin. My Tempest sits idling in the University parking lot, because this is a pulp mill town and there are no "Healthy Communities Don't Idle" signs here. I slide into the front seat and the words pour like the melt of spring, the torrential flood over the side of the eaves on the homes in my neighbourhood. We drive away from the school, conversations over country music.

In your room, there are peppermint candles burning, and Gerbera daisies resting beside my favourite food; you have absorbed me in three weeks. Down your hallway, your roommates play Guitar Hero, a strange serenade floating under your door. We have a picnic on your floor, crackers and strawberries and hot chocolate. When our mouths are satiated with food and each other, we lie on our backs and find pictures in the obscure patterns of bumps on your ceiling. Our small talk mixes with Cole's rendition of "Ziggy Stardust" (on Expert Level) and I am happy just to be here.

When we wake up, it is 4AM and the floor in your room is hard and cold. Standing up, you set your alarm in thoughts of morning classes. You pull me up and we slide into your bed, with tangled sheets and tangled feet. Sleep is almost instant, but before my

eyes close completely, you kiss my forehead and I am still just happy to be here.

In the morning, your room smells of flowers and mint and you have gone to school. Cole and I will play Super Nintendo until you come home and I am drawn back to your room and your hands. When we do homework, you will sit at your desk and I will sit on your bed, but our focus is never kept for long. Distractions arise from everything; I want to read you a sentence from my book, or you will show me a part of your presentation. It is impossible for us to stop this, whatever that means.

That night, we will curl up on the couch and watch *Waking Life*, an intelligently complex and confusing movie. It is dreams and animation and theories on light switches and time. We are muddled and complicated in our thought processes. It is full of language and words and love. You know what I mean when I say love. But how do you know for sure that you know what I mean? Polysemy. A diversity of meanings. Words change. I ask you Katy's question (Will you love me?) and you say probably, but I know my own answer is yes.

In April, we start our apartness; the distance makes me sick but I have your pillow and maybe your heart and I can only hope that things will be okay. In May, you return for Convocation and you say, "I'd forgotten how good this feels." When you leave again, this time there is no nervous knot in my stomach. I have your pillow and definitely your heart.

Every sentence I say to you, in the now that was then, letters that I write, thoughts in my head, feel like they should end with I love you. I am in love with you. I love you. In June, I visit your hometown. You pick up litter that you see on the street. Your mom tells me stories and it's a family I actually want to spend time with. In July, the distance is too much and I am sad that you've forgotten. Sad is not strong enough, but what else can I say for something I cannot describe.

Flash-forward: It's October and I am still loving you, long-distance and unofficial. Talking to you is still the best part of my day and this will not change for many months.

Then, I will date other boys. I am not sure I love you, but in those moments, I cannot imagine spending my time, long-term, with another else. And I am almost sure you aren't the one, but in a snapshot of the future (wedding kids growing old) I cannot help but picture you. I will love another whole-heartedly and still come back to thoughts of you.

In December 2008, I recognize that we are holding each other back. You are 25 – how funny that I have still not reached that age. Then, I had not yet turned 21. It cannot work. I have so much more I need to do and you are an adult, growing into the marriage/kids/minivan sense of the word. You e-mail me on all occasions involving the consumption of alcohol; you're crazy and I'm crazy to be crazy about you.

Again, I date other boys; again, I compare them to you. In August, 2009, I have still not seen you since I visited your hometown and we plan visits and talk on the phone and I try to remember to not plan my wedding to a person I am not in a relationship with. At

the end of October, a phone call tells me that I am going to Japan. I am scared that I will hate it and want to come home. I am scared that I will love it and not want to come home.

You tell me, I am going to move to Vancouver. You tell me, I want to be with you. We talk about moving in together and make our relationship Official, as official it can be, for the first time since 2007. I arrive in Okinawa and we e-mail daily. I meet a boy and (I will blame Culture Shock for this) tell you it's over. I leave you for the first time, instead of you leaving me.

Some summer day, we connect on the Internet. You tell me: sometimes I still think I'll marry you. Sometimes, I still think I'll marry you, too.

After 5 years of physical absence and 5 years of growth in emotional intimacy, we finally meet and touch and exist in the same place. I tell a classmate, "I had dinner with my ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend," and to them, it's weird and to me it's weird how not weird it is. I know I want you to be happy. I know that we are never free to make each other happy at the same time or not happiness in the way that we have wanted at different times. We're the same and we're different and I'm finally the age that you were when all this started. And I know this is to be continued because you're one of my important people. That's all. For now. The end.

"Your real first love will make you realize your first love wasn't really your first love."

He is this lesson learned.

He is every Disney movie I watched as a child and every romantic comedy I swooned over in adolescence.

He is fancy date night dinners and Sunday afternoon farmers markets.

He is every cliché in every poem ever written; he is everything that's already been said.

He is a list of qualities I wrote for the man I wanted to marry, a check-list of criteria captured long before I would contact him.

He is the realization of, "Oh, there you are. I've been waiting for you."
