

To Need is Only a Want

A Personal Essay

You can always tell the attention someone will show to your state of mind by how they step on wildflowers. I didn't really recognize that until I realized how many wildflowers I may have stepped on back in PA. They grow back in a matter of hours, they're fine... but out here in the West? You have to pay more attention. You might step on one that signals the rest of the patch to wither^[CDW1].

Growth^[CDW2]

The worst part about the road-ditch-refrigerator of a house I live in is how sunlight stabs its way through the windows. 7:06am and it slices through my blinds- no matter their angle- up under my eyelids, prying them open with golden fingers till I toss the sunny solicitors off by rolling to my side^[CDW3]. Yet the table of plants below the window (a scraggly band of 3) counter my move, lapping up every drop that lands on their green only to then be deprived of any more sun by 9:45am. I try to move the new philodendron cutting in its warped baseball team cup to a south facing windowsill, but the porch outside squeezes any rays into a sliver that widens to 3 feet at most. It only lasts a couple more hours at which point the jagged teeth of the mountains begin to gobble up Apollo, and the leaves and I are left to bask in LEDs, computer screens, and the sparks of pseudo-flint on steel... enjoy your toke Blake.

Erosion

I'm a daredevil according to my sister. I'm an out-of-stater according to my roommate. I'm too hard on myself according to my lover^[CDW4]. I say I'm a mix of challenge-seeker and world view peanut gallery. I have a whole lot of opinions on how inefficient and stupid most of the people in the world are, but I also have only actually met one person that I really would call

stupid. People are great when they are face to face. They have reasons and stories behind their mindsets, how could I blame them? But I can blame myself when anything goes [wrong](#)^[CDW5].

Overall, I think I am in way too deep with all this character development crap. I just want to run into the mountains and be a hermit.

I don't think I know why I decided to come to Colorado. I know I said for the mountains, for the skiing, for the Physics program. But why do I even want to study physics? I think I decided I hated my high school physics teacher and left in pursuit of pure spite. But I also remember writing college applications about the physics of Parkour and how I was somehow going to unravel some secrets of the body through it. I definitely wasn't planning on staying up till 5am every night of last semester's final month with a bunch of Astronomy nerds. God. Can you believe they called me the nerd of the group because I like math? [You](#)^[CDW6] *literally like watching rocks spin in circles over and over*. And I don't even have a math minor. Maybe I just wanted to delay the departure from my Peter Pan Complex, always capable, full of potential, always a child and never growing up or defining myself. But somehow, I escaped that pit. Somehow, I got so hung up on the details that I looked up one day and realized I was too far up a cliff to climb down, and I had to keep scrabbling.

God knows. I hate feeling like I'm scrabbling.

Growth

I think my plants believe they live in Seattle. Or maybe Portland on the rainy days. "It's always a rainy day in Seattle," my dad used to say. I've never been, but he says he went to school there. I kind-of take his word for it. The sun burns the roof but never warms their leafy backs.

Man, I need to water my cactus. I[CDW7] know it's built for the clouds forgetting their appointments... but I don't think there should be extra roots growing out of the arms of it either. First day I had it, my friend left at the start of the pandemic for Montana, a home of sorts, and she needed someone to take care of her three plants... only 1.5 of them were alive when she brought the trio. I gave up on the husk, quenched the flower's thirst, and sawed off the mold breeding on the cactus. Only a little stump still had life in it. Now I look at it with two arms sprouted each half a foot long, and all vibrant green, if a little gangly.

But that's not the point. Have you ever seen a potted plant you received dying, then bloom whole bouquets of yellow every three weeks? Do you know how good that feels? It's like you assign a plant to a person, and when it's doing well you think of them and when it shrivels you call them asking how they feel[CDW8]. And for three months you call them and see them brighten yellow blossoms in their laughter, and nothing can spoil that feeling. But sometimes there are no flowers. Sometimes its leaves are firm and vibrant, the roots reach deep, but it isn't the time for laughter[CDW9].

There is a stunning flower that grows below the Indian Peaks that only roots above tree level upwards of 11000' with plenty of snowmelt and on the east side of a boulder overhang. *Well, that's the only place I've ever seen it, so I'm probably full of shit[CDW10]. But I imagine it feeds off the sunrise and sleeps all afternoon, and at night it reflects the heavens becoming a star of its own, reflecting the moonrise.* The blooms have thin deep purple-nearly-black petals spread out in five-point star, and maybe 5-11 of these clings tight to a long central stalk, which itself juts out from a helical rose of wide and tender leaves. Under phone-camera flashlight the petals sparkle and light up iridescent like the nighttime cyclist just ahead of headlights, such that a proper image of these must be taken from afar rather than up close lest the result be a

blinding silver star. The whole patch of these numbered only about 8 plants, and I've yet to come across the specimen again.

Erosion

I promised my parents I would call up an Autoshop to check out the brakes on my car nearly 4 months ago. I told my boss I'd finish sketching up all the parts for the vacuum chamber insert in a couple days nearly a week ago. (He knew that wasn't going to happen. "Everything takes about twice as long as it should and 3 times as long as you need it to take." But it's the precedent that grinds at my teeth.) I told myself I would be working out three times a week since last December. I told my dad I'd finish the stack of books on my desk so I could start reading the self-help book he sent me in the mail. My core classmates and I *vowed* we would do the textbook readings before each lecture. I told 5 friends on separate occasions that I can't wait to go for a hike with them or just call to catch up. And I've done none of it, or I'm only halfway through, or I finished yesterday, and no one is actually upset at me for taking so long except myself because the only deadlines I know how to meet are ones set by someone else. I don't know why I can't do something that matters to me and only me, but I haven't been able to for as long as I can remember[CDW11].

My therapist gave me a couple articles on self-sabotage about two months ago and I was really excited to see if I'd gain some insight from them... still haven't read them yet. It's like I have this fear of choosing anything for myself. I'm quick to help out a friend or take on more and more responsibility either at work or school or clubs, but if I say I want to finish something to really show off my hard work, as long as no one asked me for it, I can't do it. And I used to beat myself up for all of it as I would run off on another hike. Another form of escapism. Another day saying, "Well shit I wasted this day, tomorrow I have to do twice the amount of work now."

Part of me wonders if I like the stress. Maybe I like pushing things off to the last minute because then I don't get to finish my work and enjoy the day. Instead, I spend the day knowing I should work so I can do something meaningful afterwards, but instead delay delay delay until at last I have to stay up all night finishing an assignment or a project because then. THEN it isn't for me. It's for whoever set the deadline. And I'm more comfortable working for someone else than myself. I don't even think it's a self-love issue. I think I just like being able to complain about how much stuff I have to get done. Maybe it makes me feel important?

Growth

I used to be so jealous of guys who could cry. They could unlock some gate I haven't found and let anything pour out: sticks, stones, coffee beans, vanilla wafers, saltwater lakes... *anything*. Whichever beavers keep piling leaves and mud into the front of my brain seriously should join an engineering team- they know how to block a flood! Eventually I sort of accepted it. It's not like I hide my emotions. I try to communicate with my friends or family about what's got me up and down as much as possible. And I think the more I focus on the moment and doing something intentional, even if it's not the next assignment I have due, I end up enjoying my day as well as getting the assignment done.

I fell into the moment when I started studying every single flower that I came across on my hikes on that one trail. It wound its way up a mesa right behind a cemetery near my house, and when I first started hiking it religiously, I was running. But I got so caught in seeing millions of flowers and whole patches of bright yellow blackeyed-susan types one week and then Mariposa Lilies in another, then yellow violets, and vibrant cornflowers. As I climbed higher and higher, I found all sorts of succulents in bloom and I began to breathe in the air differently. Focusing on the way the flowers held their own seasons and different elevations had their own seasons even just 5000 feet apart. The Season of the Hedgehog Cactus, Fairy Trumpets (long slender scarlet blossoms crying out their jubilation for their season), the Season of the

Paintbrush- in reds yellows and whites, and the Season of the Blue Flax and the Columbines. The best season, the season in which I began to really come into a stride of forgetting my summertime woes is the Season of the Forget-Me-Nots. I began to spend more time taking pictures of each species peppered all throughout the alpine than actually hiking. I stayed on trail, but I sought those paths that saw few feet with a vengeance. The more I discovered, the more I craved. It wasn't just a curiosity or a budding appreciation for the varying beauty, it was like I was growing my own sense of wonder. I was proud of each new flower; it was the first time in ages where I let myself be proud of my own self-serving. I was capturing beauty and memorizing it in my head. I would tell my grandmother and friends. I would boast of all the glory to be found and I did it purely because it felt good. I got to the point where my hiking buddies would stop to point out a flower mid-14er in case I hadn't seen that kind yet. I began to learn to embrace a Want.

Erosion^[CDW12]

The winter is here, Colorado bathes in crystal, and the flowers are mere echos in memory sometimes jogged by a camera-roll-scroll-through. I still haven't done any of the things I need to do. But I also remind myself to stop in the middle of eroding my own joy. As I am tearing apart the validity of my place in my life and the lives I touch in passing, I look back and see how after this summer of botany, I received the best grades in my college career last semester, I found a job (for which I am still tardy on the vacuum parts^[CDW13]), the friend whose plants I took in has turned lover, I enrolled in therapy, I made some really good tacos last night, and I learned to step lightly when I examine my own wildflowers. I can grow, and as I do, I let more grow around my roots. But when I callously unearth a patch of mountainside, the sun so swiftly bakes and spreads a trampled field into a barren scar. Some plants grow but once in a lifetime. Don't drive them extinct by never looking down.