

We had almost forgotten to pour shots of Fernet last Saturday. Almost, but Jack remembered, and I found it hard to not think of him selfishly, because it was Jack, and Jack is known to prioritize the self. His self. But is there such a thing as unselfish mourning? Can you feel the loss of others in terms of others? And these ‘others’ are not the same—no, the others who are now dead are far different from the others we are trying to appease at this low, low hour. And it’s not empathy, it’s not sympathy, it’s what I said: appeasement. I’m trying to be selfless, as you can see, I’m trying, but there’s two roadblocks between me and my selfless sorrow—except they aren’t roadblocks at all, are they? After the funeral, Patty called it the same as the emptiness between us and the sun, and I don’t think a road exists there that could be blocked—it’s impassable in its own right—but even if you could put a roadblock on such a thing, who would want to? Patty also said, later, that it was like trying to reach for a friend but you’re on the wrong side of a canyon: impossible, totally and unforgivingly futile, but it—‘it’ of course being the art of mourning—it isn’t like those things. How can it be? Those great expanses of canyon and space are only traversed by the lucky few, and that’s where the simile falls apart, because no one has ever traversed mourning and landed on the other side intact.

What does Camus call dying? A closed door, I think.

But nonetheless, they are my roadblocks. The second roadblock—I’ll start with that one because I don’t want to think of May now, even though I certainly already am and certainly continually will—I noticed at Lorry’s Well on Saturday. You know the place, we talked about it last time. It was before Jack said, *Hey, what about Fernet? She always bought Fernet on Saturdays*, but after he said, *I have to call my sister, she was May’s age*, even though twenty-three and twenty-eight are different ages, at least to me. Patty bought three shots, one for her and one for me and one for May (Jack reached for the third: *Oh, thanks, Patty!* but only met the swift

swat of a hand, and it wasn't mine), and I took my shot and dumped May's into our beer bucket and reached to grab another beer but—alas!—the bottles were all empty. I was surprised. I grabbed Pat, did I already tell you this? Shook her and said, *The beers! The beers are gone!* but Pat just said, *Then order more.*

Camus suggests May might've had a coffee, yeah?

My second roadblock from selflessness is this: I've found that mourning is a skill, it's learned and honed, and everyone practices with their own style and own faulty technique, unique just like everything else—a sad, sad fingerprint. For me, mourning is beer bottles and shot glasses, but of course you know that, and when I find myself bottle-less in times of need and grief I cry out like a hypochondriac without his crutches; but luckily, I have Pat there to tell me, *Well, damn it, then stand up.* But my mooney mourning—my gluttonous grief—can't be selfless because for two and a half decades I built it selfishly, not to appease others but to appease myself, and it now stands as a wall constructed of me, by me, for me—solely me and nothing but. Me, me, me. This second roadblock has been built brick by selfish brick, death by careful death, for so long now that I can't see over or around or across or through or any of the prepositions I can think of.

This is where I disagree with Camus. The when and how does matter, when it happens too soon and when it happens like that.

The first roadblock—the one where May makes an appearance—happened at her funeral. It was an open casket and thank god (lowercase g—O! prithee smiteth me, I'd, for how can I continueth at which hour the mistress I loveth is in loveth with a c'rpse?), because I don't know what Patty might've done had she not seen her one last time. And then they shut the casket—this is an ambiguous they: I could have sworn no soul stood beside May when the lid slowly closed,

as if her ghost reached up with an invisible hand, grabbed the latch, and told us all, ‘Please, I wanted this for a reason.’ But here is the roadblock, doc: after the casket was locked and sealed and she was lowered into the earth (lowercase e—Go ahead and crush me you secular beast, you consumed the body of the woman who the woman I love loved, and I will not stand for—why do I do this? What do you mean, you know why. Why do I make jokes in the wake of a life? The life of a friend, yet I sit here distraught because the girl I love was in love with her. It’s not grieving, it’s not mourning. It’s barely surviving, doc. It’s called digressing, and I do it because the other option sucks. Flat out, it sucks. So may I continue?), Pat turned and buried her face into the divot of my shoulder and crushed my ribs in a hug and cried. It hurt, not the crushed ribs but the tears, and I learned consolation, much like mourning, is a skill, and it is one I have neglected and could not share with her. This will never change; you and I both know that.

The truest of Camus, I’ve told you it before, I think. We die, yet we are never happy. Something like that.

I plan to be the most selfish of mourners. I will continue my routine, my duty, of watching friends expire just to carry on with a smile while I walk to the nearest watering hole, and there (this too will never change) I will sit my happy ass on a stool and say nothing about anything to no one. I will empty bottles into my mouth in order to fill the bottles in my heart, and I will bury them deep inside me where they will never be touched again. *Bury them*, I will say. *Bury them deep.*