*It is Monday, 8:13pm, I am sitting at the dining room table at my home in Boulder. Julie and Kenzie are giving each other massages on the couch, Christian is trying to solve a rubik's cube in the living room, and relaxing music is playing over Alexa. I’m content.*

Dear Diary,

This year is so interesting already. It’s crazy how quickly the world changes and still how often I relearn the same thing again and again. I feel like there are a million different things for me to write about, but as usual, instead of obsessing over getting every detail down I’m just going to write until I no longer feel like writing, and I will see what comes out.

**Dylan**

First things first, Dylan is basically my life right now -- so I think it is only appropriate to start there. I spend so much time with him. I spend every weekend with him, many days during the week with him, and many hours during the work day on Zoom with him.

His divorce was finalized today. He got word from Lia and got the news in the mail.

I don’t know how I feel about it.

On the one hand, I am so grateful and so happy that he and I get to only focus on *us* now and that this is no longer looming over either of our heads. On the other hand, I am feeling upset that I was dragged into this situation by Dylan without agency or consent or all of the knowledge that I deserved to know about what was really going on in his marriage. I am also feeling concerned, because I don’t want to play any role in the ending of his marriage, especially since I don’t expect to be with Dylan for forever, and so I don’t want there to be any remorse from him for ending a marriage for someone else that he also didn’t end up with…

It is a confusing feeling. It also makes me wonder if I honestly could ever handle a polyamorous or open relationship -- or if my wants of that have actually just been me lying to myself to keep my walls up and to keep myself protected from heartache for falling too deeply for someone again like I did with Chandler.

Dylan has on multiple occasions told Lia that he misses her and that he will always love her. I’m okay with that, because I can’t imagine what it would be like to divorce someone after being with them for a decade. But it doesn’t make it hurt me any less.

I told him today that this divorce has made me feel like I haven’t been allowed to be the main character of his love story. I think that is the best way I can sum up how all of this has made me feel.

When I discovered the 7 minute voice message he sent Lia on new years explaining how much he loved and missed her and how he often wonders “what if we had made this work??” -- I considered breaking up with him right then.

That’s how I knew that I’m in too deep though. I knew that it wasn’t enough to make me break up with him. I tapped back into the person that I am when I consider being in an open relationship or when I fantasize about having multiple emotional partners… I was able to move forward in a mature way. I realized it was because it made it insurmountably easier for me to put walls back up.

Trust loss equates to walls up.

On multiple occasions, Dylan has lost my trust.

He does well to build it back, but sometimes I feel like I will never fully trust him -- because of the fact that he historically lies to himself sometimes.

He has lied to himself about how much he has processed about the ending of his marriage, and so it causes him to lie to me about how much he has processed.

But it’s okay. I gave him the night to process his feelings on this day and to do it alone or with others, but not with me.

I’m okay. Now that I am taking care of myself and taking the night off of work and drinking tea and spending time to feel relaxed I am feeling much better about it all.

To be completely, 100% honest -- I love Dylan with all of my heart. He is so many things that I want in a lifelong partner, he is so many things that I have dreamt of in a companion, and yet… I am fairly certain that he will not be my forever.

I know that there’s still things I have left to do in this world without him as my partner. And that’s okay. I’ll cross that bridge when (or *if*, I’ll stay optimistic) I come to it.

Other things that I have been struggling with in terms of Dylan lately are his mental health challenges. Being a partner to someone who is struggling deeply with depression, bipolar disorder, being on mood stabilizer meds for the first time ever, dealing with divorce, in a 2nd career transition, and struggling to get out of bed some days…. Is *hard*.

It’s almost harder that I imagine those things would feel for myself. I don’t have any agency to build good habits or to try to make it better. So instead I just have to sit with the sadness, hold Dylan when he cries, and hope that it will get better soon. I can’t *fix* anything. I just have to be patient and recognize that on any given day it might be a good day or it might be a bad day for Dyl and there’s nothing I can do to prevent one or encourage the other, but I have to often sit with the aftermath and feel the impact on my own mental health.

It is hard days with Dylan’s mental health that make me question if this relationship is really good for me and my own mental health. Not being able to prepare for what kind of emotion is going to be felt on any day is exhausting and impossible to keep up with.

No matter how well I take care of myself or how much effort I put into keeping my own place and mind clean, uncluttered, healthy, and optimistic -- it doesn’t ever guarantee any sort of difference for Dylan’s mental health.

It makes me feel like I am being asked to hold an impossible weight for my age and for the amount of mental space and care that I have to give to others.

It makes me feel like I am being pulled down and weighted down in a way that hurts me so deeply, I can’t even express it with words.

The worst feeling I have ever felt in this relationship was in the middle of January when I was at Dylan’s place one day. He was having a bad mental health day and I was trying to get some work done at his place. I heard him sobbing and yelling in the bath for an hour, but I had to do work and I didn’t want to intervene, so I let him be alone to process his emotions. He came out of the shower and started bawling to me. He told me he was hopeless and that he had lost all hope for anything. He was so indescribably sad. When I looked in his eyes, I saw nothing.

He wouldn’t listen to me, nothing I said made him feel any differently. I started shaking him. I screamed at him asking him where he was and what was going on. I started sobbing and yelling at him to come back to me.

I stopped shaking him and I looked at his eyes. What I saw is something I hope to **never** see again. Ever.

I saw death in his eyes. It was dull. It was *dark*. It was painful. It was fleeing. It was *empty*. It was blank. It was distant. It was somewhere else that was not in the same room as me. Somewhere that wasn’t even on this planet with me. It was the most scared and sad I have ever felt looking into someone else’s eyes. His eyes were pointed at me, but they weren’t *looking* at me. They were looking through me, past me, into a world that I can only say I have glimpsed in moments of pure grief, loss, sadness, and hopelessness.

That moment made me so intensely scared to be in this relationship with Dylan.

Was he going to hurt me in the same ways that Chandler did when he used to threaten to hurt himself when I would get close to breaking up with him? Was he going to hurt me by *leaving* me in this lifetime like Wesley almost did? Was he ever going to take his life like my cousin Cody did?

He has hurt himself before. Even recently. While we’ve been fighting. During our fight on Thanksgiving break after hanging out with Paige and Collin, Dylan finally admitted that he was the one who left all of the bruises on his stomach by stabbing himself with his keys.

I was appalled. He had lied to me to try to cover it up and he was now trying to convince me that he would never do that again and it was in the past.

He also told me the same thing when he was texting his ex-wife (now) to tell her he misses her. But he did that just last week for her birthday.

This is what I mean by Dylan sometimes lying to himself so that he can lie to others in order to curate the reality that exists around him.

I wonder if he is so emotionally and mentally fucked in our relationship because I am forcing him to face all of his demons and lies and fake realities for once and take a long, hard look at the truth that he has created around himself.

His lack of community in friends and family, his lack of knowing what is next in his career, his lack of money or finances to keep him grounded, his lack of ability to pay for rent in the future, his lack of grieving and processing of the ending of his previous relationships, his lack of awareness around his mental health issues, his lack of acceptance of his own grief and sadness and depression, his lack of self love.

These are all *hard* truths that he has been lying to himself about for years and I am finally forcing him to take a long hard look at them, stare them in the face, *feel* them, *acknowledge* them, be *honest* about them, and **do something** about them.

I’m not going to lie. Dating Dylan is *hard*. Sometimes it is **really** *hard*.

And sometimes, it feels like it is the best feeling in the whole world.

This past weekend was valentine's day weekend. Dylan and I went to get Kava and then Dylan threw me a surprise party with all of my roommates and Courtney and her visiting friend on Friday. He actually surprised the shit out of me. He threw the party literally just to show love for me and to thank me for being so supportive of him lately and to congratulate me for my internship. It was possible the sweetest thing that anyone has ever done for me.

The next day we decided to not go to the fancy restaurant that I made reservations for and instead to go to get Pho and talk about spirituality. Then Dylan took me to a pottery class as a surprise to me. I’ve *always* wanted to try pottery. It was so much fun.

The next day, Dylan and I went to the art museum, and it was amazing. We got high from edibles and then he surprised me by taking me to tea! It was also amazing. It was so much fun and such a surprise and literally the best valentine’s day (weekend) ever.

So that’s why I am so taken back by this relationship. It is the most extreme emotions and experiences I have ever felt in partnership with anyone else. The most intense lows and depressions I have ever felt happen within days of the most incredible highs and love I have ever felt for someone else.

I was looking back at some of my old February diary entries, because I haven’t done that for a while -- and I was reminded that at this time last year I was simultaneously *kicking ass* and also feeling a bit lonely.

I was finally living into my young adult dream of sobriety from weed, and it was nothing but positive on my mental health, my daily habits, my optimism, and my relationships with others. At the same time though, I was also describing a feeling of longing for *love* of someone else. The ability to cuddle, to be silly, and to love unconditionally.

I have now achieved that. One year later I can honestly admit that I am head over heels in love with Dylan. Some days it’s easy. Some days it’s hard.

I’ve achieved what I sought out -- cuddles, silliness, lots of love and laughter, cute experiences, a balance in my life. I have also had to deal with (and continue to deal with) quite a bit of baggage; the divorce, mental health issues, jealousy and comparison, fighting, bad days, imbalance with community…

I sometimes forget that partnership is not meant to be easy.

I idealize what life is like in an “easy” partnership -- someone who is stoic or not dramatic, a relationship that is open or polyamorous to ease the pressure, a relationship with a woman to ease my curiosity…

And yet, I don’t think that any of those kinds of relationships would be any easier. They would all contain their own complexity and pain.

It’s like what the Buddha said -- all life is suffering, I just need to find my circle of suffering that I can find joy and contentment in.

Right now I’d like to think that I’ve found that.

I feel quite content right now.

Sure, I feel stressed from work, I feel anxiety about Dylan and his own mental health struggles with his career and community, I feel nervous about my own community and my place in my career or in this world -- and yet, I feel **content**.

Santosha.

If I could at this moment name two words to define my goals in this life, it would be (1) Santosha, and (2) Confidence.

I feel like contentment and confidence are themes that will continue to emerge in different ways in my life.

So I suppose I have filled up this entire diary entry with Dylan thoughts so far (like I said before, it’s actually pretty fitting) -- but now I’ll take a moment to reflect on me and how I’m doing.

**Me**

This is a good question. I haven’t been reflecting too much on myself lately. I’ve been trying to meditate almost every day. At the very least I have been doing it multiple times a week. Though I’ve been struggling to stay present during my meditations.

I have been trying to fall asleep reading when I am staying at my own place. So far I haven’t been able to do that with Dylan and it makes me sad, we usually fall asleep to reality tv -- which sometimes triggers my depression or eating disorder and puts me in a funk. I’ve told him about this and its something I hope we work on together.

I have felt pretty triggered by my eating disorder lately. I have been eating so much bad food and in too large of quantities. I haven’t felt quite as compulsive as I have at my worst, but I have been hiding eating from my roommates and from Dylan at times and I haven’t felt like I am in tune with my food at all. Dylan and I are about to go on a diet this week and I am really hoping that it is a 30 day opportunity to find a new relationship with my food again.

I have been noticing that my love for myself and my body more specifically has been low lately, most likely because I haven’t been eating well and so I’ve been bloated and unhappy with what I’m putting in my body. I think my gut health has also been fucked which is probably playing a role in the sadness that I feel towards myself at times. I hesitate to think that everything will be fixed when I diet because I have been here before. And just like I have already learned in the past, if I keep trying to achieve some ideal thing that is not achievable in the future (e.g., being skinny or liking the way I look) -- then I will obsess over the results so much that I will either never get there, or I won’t appreciate it when I do get there because it won’t look the same way that it did in my dreams.

I have been obsessing over the idea of losing weight for Paige’s bachelorette party and wedding. I don’t know why. I think because I want others to think that I’m hot and because I want to look good for the photos and also because… well I really don’t know why else! I am hoping that eating *better* food will help me think more positively about my body -- **not losing weight**. Because that is unsustainable and an unhealthy way to set my expectations and love for myself.

Outside of the food that I am eating and how it is making me feel about my body image, I must admit that in many other ways in my life right now I am arguably killing it. I got the offer for the internship with FATE last week, and that is something that I have been working towards for *years*. I am achieving my goals with my career and kicking ass doing it. I am makign a name for myself in the field that I was hoping to build a career in. I am on top of all of my classes and kicking ass in those too. I am being a great girlfriend. I am building community with my roommates and beyond. I am maintaining community with high school friends (Morgan, Paige, Tori, and I all have biweekly game nights and I look forward to them so much). I am maintaining community with Claudia and even other college friends (had a game night with the boy gang from college just two weeks ago).

I am so so so proud of myself.

Honestly. I am so proud of myself for constantly showing up for others and for putting in the hard work to be healthy so that I can be there for myself.

I am doing the thing!! I’m living my life and learning how to do it while being happy and healthy and in connection with others!!

I feel like I’m simultaneously growing up so fast and still so young.

Covid has made everything feel like a blur and it also makes it impossible for me to envision what the future might look like. I don’t even know when I’ll be allowed to go in public without a face mask on next.

I don’t know when I’ll be taking classes in person again next (if ever).

I don’t know when I’ll be moving out of this house and into my own place.

Also -- Dylan is moving to Boulder. He officially signed his lease today.

I’m really excited for him to be coming here. I hope he didn’t do it for me, but regardless I think it will be nothing but good for our relationship.

I’m going to be in Boulder this summer for the first time.

Eric might get his first job.

Wesley is living a life in Colombia.

My parents are on a couples trip with their friends in Mexico.

My family is kicking ass.

I love my family so much. Our trip to Mexico was so cathartic and such an amazing culmination of the amazing work we are all putting in. My mom is more than six months sober now. Wesley is putting himself out there in a new country where he will continue to live for a long time. Eric is finally making moves for his career and his future. My parents are working on their marriage. My dad is finding ways to take rest for his mind since his accident.

And I… well, I am finding time and methods to continue to take care of myself. Not only so I can take care of others and be there for others and show love to others… but so I can do those things for myself.

I’m honestly feeling good.

I’m feeling a bit burnt out from my career, my relationship, my community building, and the state of the world -- but I am also feeling so proud of myself for how far I have come.

A few years ago I hadn’t ever meditated before. A few years ago I was just realizing I had an unhealthy relationship with weed. A few years ago I was completely unaware that I had an eating disorder. A few years ago I was forcing myself to wear too many hats to meet the expectations of others that I was creating in my own mind.

And yet, a few years ago I was more self aware than I could ever expect a 20 year old to be. I was more reflective and forgiving and optimistic than I could have ever asked anyone else to be who was going through similar hardships and new emotions and experiences.

I was learning to make a life for myself, to be there for myself, to take care of myself, and to love myself.

And I continued to work. Year after year. Day after day. I continued to put the work in.

And I have made it to where I am today. I’ll continue to put the work in. I’ll continue to learn and to grow in these ways… and I’ll also pause.

I’ll also take a moment to take a step back and look at who I am, right now. I’ll pause and reflect and be proud and happy of what I have done and who I have become, without prescribing or predicting who I will continue to become in the future.

Jess. I know you are 24, and the world is simultaneously unforgiving and indescribably beautiful. I know you work your ass off. You deserve everything that you have. You are amazing. You are beautiful inside and out. You are loved. You are doing everything you can do. You are doing your best and that is all you can ask of yourself. You are waking up every morning and doing all that you can do, and some days that is a lot and some days that is a little and both are okay. I love who you are. I love what you do. I love who you wish to become and I love who you are becoming. I will continue to love you, every day, forever. No matter what.

This is a love letter to myself. I hope to keep writing love letters to remind myself just how much I fucking love myself. I am so ridiculously proud of myself for everything that I do. Sometimes I just need to gently remind myself to take the world a little bit less seriously and instead turn my attention inward on the amazing love and life that exists inside of me.

I appreciate me.

I care for me.

I love me, unconditionally, forever.

And with that…. I think that I have completed my journaling for the night. I do not know when I will write next, but I do hope that it is soon.

So, until then I suppose.

With so much *freaking* love,

**Jess**

Age 24