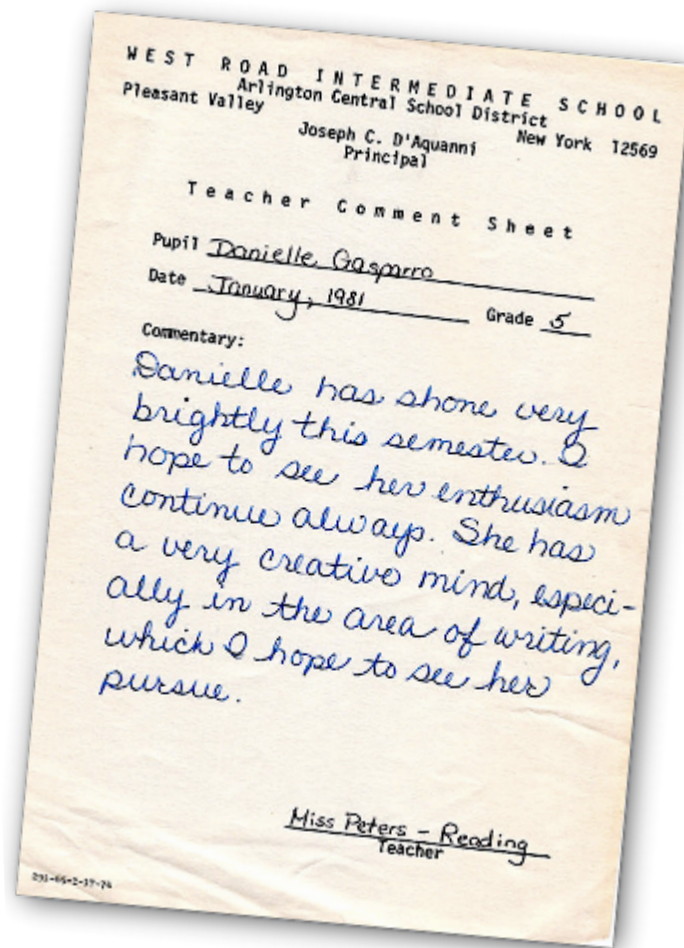


Again Like April: A Love Letter for the Mystically Disinclined



Spring 2013

Dear Miss Peters,

Greetings from the American heartland!

I hope this missive finds you well. That is to say, should it somehow, someday travel beyond my imaginary version of you and greet the actual eyes, mind, and heart of you. Any facet of which I'm aware would likely struggle to recollect who I am. Or, I should say...who I *was*. It has, after all, been thirty-two years since you extended—through the thirty-

five beautifully cursive, royal blue words you penned into my fifth-grade teacher comment sheet—two radiant gleams of hope as to how I might best flourish and serve others during this wild, evolutionary ride called life.

Nevertheless, in light of a recent and rather astonishing turn of events, I'm



compelled to bring you up to speed on my progress. In so doing, I want to also extend my gratitude, retroactive to not merely the day you so eloquently expressed your kind—and keen—comments, but to whatever point in time you decided to pursue the field of teaching, which I now see is the true seedbed from which this love letter was destined to bloom.



Regarding the matter of my enthusiasm: I'm thrilled to report that despite the various trials I've been summoned to endure since grade five, I believe it is fair and impartial to note that I've been—and yes, intend to always be—*gung-ho* about the human experience. (NOTE: incidents of war, prejudice, physical violence against anything, racial injustice, corporate greed, environmental abuse, megalomania, and poorly made coffee, excluded.) Hell, for most of my life, I've been so inclined to buck any downtrodden feelings up into mental bell-kicks of meaning that for twenty years I elected to stay the unstable artist-life course as a performing-songwriter—a biographical detail I suspect may please you, given the vision that kindled your other gleam of hope: that across all my earthly days I would choose to rise and guide my creative thoughts to reach a pen to reach a page.

Mind you, not all of the writing I've done since attending West Road Intermediate School has taken the shape of a song lyric. I'd give just about anything to share with you and you alone the countless musings-turned-crappy first drafts of poems and essays that have kept me up at night over the past four decades, agonizing over undecided line breaks and comma placements. Most notably during the life chapter in which I *first* attended college, from age 18-21, and majored in...that's right, you nailed it, Miss Peters... Creative Writing. The truth is, while I've always known way deep down where it indispensably counts that *words alone* are the fuel that feeds my soulfire, when I felt called at that time to leave higher education behind and follow my musical bliss, I conscientiously—aaaand...(wait for it)

....enthusiastically!—did. So, despite your prudent hope that writing be the terrain my mind would devotedly explore and settle, I cannot claim the better part of my days have been spent engaged in this pursuit. That is to say, I *could not*. Until now.



For as you, Miss Peters, were surely well-aware in January of 1981, evolution—as bumpy and detour-riddled a ride as it might be—is essentially, and in its highest, most purposeful form: *change over time*. Had the wisdom of your comment sheet, a keepsake my dear mother knew (ah, moms) was worthy of a sacred spot inside her ever-brimming (yes, literally and figuratively) hope chest, greeted me at any point prior to the precise moment it did (April 2011) when I, age forty, had tucked my songsmith cap away for months while contemplating a return to college to complete the aforementioned Bachelor’s degree I had abandoned so many moons, suns, stars, and shitty first drafts ago, your urging that I keep the searchlight of my mind’s eye tilted towards the page would have no doubt been cherished as I “happened” upon it during a desperate search for a treasured photo of my then terminally ill father, but I am sure it would not have been so fiercely heeded.



And the crazy thing is—no, Miss P., make that: the *sanity-saving sequence of cosmically connected dots that unite to form the singular thing that bids me to write you at last*, and that on this blazing bright spring day in 2013 feels at once unbelievable and so masterfully schemed is...

Had I not followed your gleams of hope that I explore the wide open plains of the page at the *exact* life

juncture I've noted here—a terrestrial trailmarker at which I was no longer willing or able to mute the siren of my writing soul—I would also not have ended up, one year later, a high-achieving middle-aged undergrad in a remarkable course entitled “Literature and Culture of the Great Depression,” for which I was required to read the novel *You Can't Go Home Again* by Thomas Wolfe, a literary masterpiece that contains within its fourth chapter a closing passage so poetically intoxicating...so piercingly instructive that upon my first taste of its lyrical deliciousness I knew...somehow, in that natural-born-day-seizer-who's-taken-countless-risks-and-leaps-and-endured-great-obstacles-to-experience-inestimable-success-and-delight-and-growth-but-is-finally-ready-to-admit-she's-resisted-her-one-true-calling-for-way-too-long kind of way...I just knew there would be revealed to me at some future moment a more potent significance to the riveting and profoundly encouraging lines:

Child, child...have patience and belief, for life is many days, and each present hour will pass away...you have been mad and drunken...filled with hatred and despair...all the dark confusions of the soul...you have stumbled...you have faltered, missed the way—this is the chronicle of the earth. Take heart...these things pass. Some things will never change. Lean down your ear upon the earth, and listen...The voice of forest water in the night, a woman's laughter in the dark, the clean, hard rattle of raked gravel, the cricketing stitch of midday in hot meadows—these things will never change...the glory of the stars, the innocence of morning, the smell of the sea in harbors...the thorn of spring—these things will always be the same...The leaf, the blade, the flower, the wind that cries and sleeps and wakes again, the trees whose stiff arms clash and tremble in the dark...will also never change. Pain and death will always be the same. But under the pavements, trembling like a pulse, under the buildings trembling like a cry, under the waste of time, under the hoof of the beast above the broken bones of cities, there will be something growing like a flower, something bursting from the earth again, forever deathless, faithful, coming into life again like April.

Again like April.

Again like April.

Those words. That phrase. Wolfe's triumphant, crowning notion to his edifying wonderpassage became for me, for months, a kind of mantra. A magnetizing chant for mind and mouth to savor with no understanding as to why.

Again like April...

Although, I did wonder. *Why?* Why in the world of innumerable words I'd read and revered across my life...why did this particular turn of phrase among so many worth savoring inside Wolfe's sublime classic...why did *this phrase* tug at my soulstrings so hastily...so relentlessly, so...intently? Perhaps the hold his pithy simile had over me was on some level tied to having lost my father to cancer's swift and savage blow only eight months prior to encountering its gripping magnificence. Was Wolfe's fervent, vivid plea to mind the brighter sides of life, no matter its nebulous hues, a means to imbue my grieving heart with hope?

Of course it was. And I'm touched to note, Miss Peters, it did.

Still, that was the spring of 2012, and by the time the calendar flipped to December, the month I would graduate with my B.A. and head back to my beloved homeland of New York City where I would, in a matter of two weeks (!?) move into a spacious, humanely priced (!?!!) studio apartment with a separate kitchen and (!?!?!?**) large bay window-as-helm to my dreamy new wordsmithing ship, Wolfe's transcendent affirmations hadn't so much faded as fused themselves into the bedrock of my curious mind...settled themselves into the pile of idea-tinder I'd been collecting since, well, I'd have to



guess (as I believe you would, too, Miss P), since the first very creative thought emerged inside my very tiny infant head. (Which apparently, and as evidenced here—a *toast to moms and hope chests everywhere!*—was often found propped inside my very, very tiny palm...perhaps a prophecy as much as a natural-born posture). At any rate, and so...there I excitedly was (in Brooklyn, even, yo!) and as it understandably goes when you've worked your straight-A-for-ASS off snagging a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a Creative Writing Concentration from an esteemed university and are officially equipped to launch your voyage onward and upward to all things prosperity, there was one demanding but critical matter that needed tending to, pronto: landing a job.

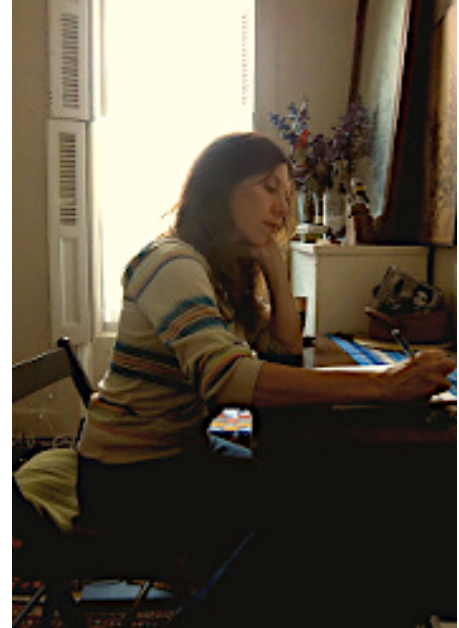
Mind you, I don't mean just any job, Miss P. No. At that point, for me, the day of the "day gig" was long gone with the musical road-warrior wind and I was at last a bona fide seeker of some meaty role I could sink my highly credentialed teeth into. A solid career opportunity. A meaningful full-time position that could never...*not ever* in any way...include within its list of qualifications the following:



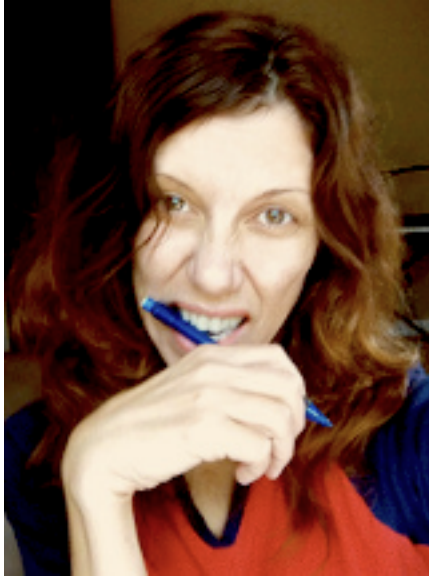
- STRONG ABILITY TO MULTI-TASK—*meaning, specifically, the ability to avert a colossal elk at three a.m. on a barren State Route 93 hopefully south while experiencing heavy eyelids, a full bladder, a red “low gas” indicator light, an uncertainty as to how many miles there are between you and the next exit boasting any signs of homo-sapien life, and a throbbing pang of hope that the concert you’re slated to perform the next evening will be attended by at least a few people who believe your music is worth some measure of their time, hearts, and hard-earned dimes—A MUST.*

Nope. For me, finally, after enduring more than a decade of indie-songsmithing strife (which, to be clear, was avidly self-inflicted and stitched over time into a priceless tapestry of meaning and whim), it was time to pass the torch of entry-level office work on to those fresh-faced “day-giggers” who would kill for

such an opportunity but that was *thank you, God!* for me a bygone means to an album-funding or band-paying end. Yes. My time for financial stability—or better yet, abundance!—had arrived. It felt good knowing I was poised to secure a respectable, mid-level position. A real-dealio grown-up person’s job that offered grown-up-people benefits, like an annual salary, paid time off, and health insurance. Some coveted role that I would eagerly spend forty-plus hours a week assigning my time and talents to as I kicked off life’s bracing “Second Act.” Sure, I might have to temp for a while, take a short-term job as head honcho to some higher-up’s petrified pile of administrative bullshit. Whatever. I’d be fine doing something I was now blatantly overqualified to do. It would only last a few months. Or maybe six months to a year, but I could bear that brunt, big fake water-cooler grin and all. What mattered most was that I had a foolproof plan: I’d reconnect with all the staffing agencies that had found me steady work across my music-making years, just to pay the bills while “Experienced Writer & Communications Specialist” me set out to sail the ideal-job-landing seas once and for all. Yes! This job search ’round I’d keep the unwavering faith as I applied with all kinds of savvy and might to all kinds of positions that I felt, for the first time in my life, genuinely interested in, and qualified to take on. Hour after hour, I’d thoughtfully dispatch varying versions of my resume, each one composed to complement a cover letter so compelling that it would not be—*could not be* overlooked. Yes indeed as first-light dazzle turned to late-night frazzle from my Brooklyn helm, I’d apply with all my bedheaded might to a wide array of prestigious positions in the literary arts. Highly coveted editorial-assistant-esque roles with premier publishing houses. Roles I’d find challenging yet stimulating and, most of all, meaningful as I forged on each morning taking the laborious reins of that other, voluntary yet involuntary occupation: Director in Charge of Encouraging My Very Creative Thoughts to Reach a Pen to Reach a Page.



But...that was early January.



Then, it was February.

Then...at some point around the beginning of March...somewhere between the super-sized chocolate hearts and beer-guzzling leprechauns...at precisely who:knows o'clock on one totally unremarkable afternoon that followed the sixty-two consecutive days I had spent feeling up then down, then up, then down...then down, then downer...then what the hell is going on...seriously? I mean how the- - where the- - who the when why in the name of what the flip is up...I know I know blah blah look alive calm

down everything for a reason...Dear Hiring Manager Dear Temp Agency Robot Dear whoever this will never reach To whom this will be of no concern craigslist dot com circling back checking in part-time temp-to-perm I understand thank you so much wait what?! Office Manager of a wholesale ceramics manufacturer? *KISS MY GRITS AND MY GRIT, GOD!* okay okay sorry I know I know suck it up people are starving Dear Hiring Manager skills are well-aligned Dear Whosewhatsy in Charge of WhoKnowsWhat look forward to your reply thank you for your time good fit spell check hit send hit send hit...send... hit...*cricket...cricket...cricket...*

Then.

On the very day I thought I just might lose my mind—that's right, Miss P., the mind you so long ago qualified as vivified and imaginative but was now feeling as stale as the half-priced day-old bagels I mined each morning from a threadbare basket at the corner deli—I was surged with a bolt



of insight so energizing...so inspiring...that I knew I was forever transformed when...thanks to our seemingly medieval but still blazingly true-blue United States Postal Service, I stood in my building's

entryway holding within my fiery-poet paws that lone, venerable voucher I had worked *so hard* to garner. That precious ticket to a brighter day that I'd sweated through so many a caffeinated night to procure. That invaluable document that served as a vital symbol of the arduous, unconventional trail I'd blazed so diligently...so passionately...so manga cum laudishly YES! There within my humble hands at last, tucked behind the massive cardboard mailer housing my Bachelor's degree, it appeared before my weary eyes: the approval letter for food stamps.

That's right, Miss P. Food stamps and yes—you've further read correctly: I felt *inspired* in that moment. Not frustrated or insecure. Not angry or shameful. Not worried or defeated. Rather, a splendid wave of (again, oh how you nailed it!) *enthusiasm* flooded through me as I stood there gobsmacked before my open mailbox, otherwise known as the empty sarcophagus that a great big huge ray of sepia light was jetting diagonally into from the window above my building's front door, revealing a micro-constellation of dust motes whirling in slow, magical circuit as if to say, "Hooray! Yay you! Life is short and hard and a beautiful dream and you are a speck of stardust just like us and Yes! this is indeed your day and epiphany to seize!" (Now, do stick with me here and don't get me wrong, that vexingly furtive power-duo of human sentiment —Doom & Gloom—were at the same time simmering somewhere deep beneath my puissant state, egging me on from the turbid corners of my mind to subconsciously rail at the All-Knowing Supremely Divine Love-Being: "Are you fuh-reaking kidding me? A thumbs up from Uncle Sam on Nutrition Assistance alights the *same day* as my Bachelor's degree boasting big fat latin honors? Really? For this, I worked myself to the wordsmithing bone? For this, I sent sixty-two earnestly composed cover letters to sixty-two probably robotic or nonexistent hiring managers as I typed *Sincerely*, and this is what I've got to show for it? This is where a life spent taking ardent leaps in the dark propelled by truth-in-spite-of-fear gets you? Really?!!!"



But I digress. (With gusto!)

The point is, given the biting reality of the paradoxical postmarks at/in hand, such thoughts, if only subconsciously fired, were to be expected. But the thing that wasn't...the thing I could never have anticipated coming to mental light after having been ostensibly dealt a cosmic kick in the teeth as I stood there riveted by the invisible wisdom of dust motes, a proud forty-three-year-old college graduate who was eager and beyond poised to cultivate personal, professional and creative abundance by way of a major career opportunity who was instead being deemed a perfect fit for the role of "Able-Bodied Adult With No Dependents Qualified to Receive \$142 per Month for the Purchasing of Household Foods Such as Breads, Cereals, Fruits, Vegetables, Meats, Fish, Poultry, Dairy Products and Seeds or Plants Which Produce Food but NOT Beer, Liquor, or Wine" (storyteller's honor, Miss P.—that's a verbatim capital N-O-T)...the single thought that in a flash crystallized and energized my creatively malnourished mind was:

I have to write about this.

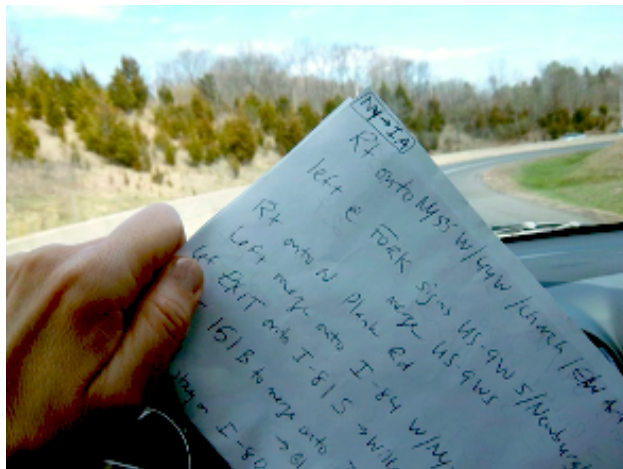
Well, okay. That, and "God, I need beer. Or liquor, or wine." But what made this solitary moment inside my brownstone entryway as transformational as it was transcendental was how intensely aware I was that the thought "I have to write about this" was *automatic*. Utterly instinctive. As knee-jerk as it gets. And being that I am both able-bodied and adult enough to know a double-feature epiphany when I'm gifted one, my bones took the reins from my brain and I darted back up to apartment 2F where I immediately launched into a new plan: I'd lower the mast a bit on my work-search excursion. Re-chart my cum-lauded course and just snag a freaking application from the nearest cafe in the hood for crying out loud! Or maybe that new yoga center on Fourth Ave has a front desk in desperate need of a Chief Om shanti, yo! Operator. Or who knows, perhaps the warrior Mexican woman I'd guess to be 75 years young who runs the cotton candy mobile up on Fifth Ave could use and/or be convinced she needs a right-hand Hiladora de Azúcar but anyhow whatever and whoopdeedoo to all that pragmatistical hullabaloo for...I get it now. I've got it now:

I have a very creative mind, especially in the area of writing, which I am meant to enthusiastically pursue.

And so, Miss Peters, my keen and kindhearted teacher of yore, this brings me back to the matter—and status—of my mind, which I am overjoyed to report I have *not* lost, and am frankly beginning to discover the true depths and dimensions of while venturing each glorious heartlandic dawn to ensure it reaches for a pen...and then a thought...and then a page because, as it turned out...



My pride was barely halfway down my pharynx that fateful, mail-fetching afternoon when the phone rang, and two dear friends I'd not spoken to in over a year were on the line, eager to play catch-up as they got down to reclining business on the deck of their home sweet farmhouse, a rustic gem of a dwelling space nestled inside an apple orchard they'd passionately owned and operated for decades in Eastern Iowa. I was familiar with their homestead as I had the joy and honor of performing a private house concert there when troubadouring around America back in...(wait for it)...*April* of 2010, and which, by the end of our conversation, I would be graciously—and jaw-droppingly—invited to come set up wordsmith shop in for as long as my soul, bones, and piggy bank deemed favorable. That is to say, so



long as I could meet the twofold criteria requested by my immensely benevolent friends yes siree heck yeah so long as I was “interested and able” well then you betchya I was more than welcome to take a blind leap west and forego the Big Apple hustle and bustle to take a relaxed, more manageable bite out of life as I once and for all got down to the industrious business of claiming

my rightful place inside that verdant territory you once hoped I would pursue, and in which my creative mind has always felt most at home: writing.

And so it goes and here we are, Miss P. Well, here *I am*, anyway. In Eastern Iowa, envisioning you receiving this honorary chronicle, which to reiterate is fundamentally meant to be a deeply felt token of gratitude for your trailblazing work as Retroactive Director Unknowingly In Charge of My Soul-Fired Wordsmithing Pursuit—which, when I arrived in my economy rental a few weeks ago to greet the Heartland’s unfathomably majestic beauty, still had me needing to make ye olde practical ends meet with a booze-craving vengeance. And yet, if I’ve come to fully grasp and hold sacred any single lesson during my stint in earth school thus far, it is this: that every single choice we have the fortune of making inside a liberated life, be it sized small, medium, or “holy crap this is SCARY” from the impetus of truth—in direct opposition to that of fear—will become an integral seed in the heartsoil that spawns an abundantly joyous, gratifying life, no matter how many shit-storms we might (read: *will*) be called to endure, to prove it. Which is to figuratively say...

As sure as I found my truth-seeking-and-heeding arse subletting my Brooklyn digs and routing my GPS to a small town just west of Dubuque within days of that blessed phone chat, I also found myself completely at ease





with the impending turbulence of my leap...totally comforted by the deep-rooted trust I had that whatever was to come of this latest “Yes!” to life would lead me to higher plains of fulfillment, purpose, and productivity. I somehow knew with every fiber of my denim overall’d being that the agonizing, asphalt-jungled chapter of fruitless toil I had endured for months (yes, while feasting

on fresh bagels and NOT drinking beer or liquor or wine!) would reveal itself to be the indispensable seed of cosmic promise I would come to cherish from atop Iowa’s eternally fertile ground.

And by golly Miss P., it done did...and I am doing...just that. Within days of pulling into my noble friends’ farmhouse drive, I found myself greeting each cock-a-doodled dawn ready and eager to tend not only the burgeoning notions of my writing soul, but the roughly 10,000 acres of sprouting cropland I was hired to scour and rid of problematic rocks for a seasonal spell. Locals have warned me of the dangers inherent to such a physically demanding gig, but having earned gold star after gold star for identifying heavy shit that, if overlooked, would inhibit the opportunity for optimal growth, I’m finding the job to be—all exasperating gnat swarms and dehydration-induced hallucinations considered—a *cinch*.

Anyhoo, you are one imagined letter-reading trooper, Miss Peters. As I trust by now you’re getting the mystical gist of this live-from-the-desk dispatch, I’ll close by saying, simply...

Countless divine assignments have laced my days in earth school since you composed your magnificent comment sheet in January of 1981. It is now *my* hope to do you proud as I work to creatively render in words what it has meant, taken, and taught me to complete them. What I can say with certainty as I pretend-send this love letter to fantastical you is that life is indeed many days, and although each present hour I’ve spent bringing my thoughts to a pen to these pages has passed away, the sun-dappled apple blossoms are bursting forth from mother earth...coming into life as they so faithfully do...again and again...in April.

Forever and enthusiastically yours,

Danielle

