



to Finneus, age three,
to be read the first time your heart is broken

by Genevieve Field

Dear Finneus,

I'm guessing you're a teenager now—16? 17?—but when I wrote this, you were about to turn three. (You wanted a car for your birthday. What's new?)

Well, if you're reading my letter, what's new is that your heart has been broken. There are things I wish I'd known about heartbreak when I was your age, and I want to pass along some hard-earned wisdom.

But first look at the snapshot I've enclosed. That's you, buddy. Check out your shaggy hair, your wide, lilting Marcona-almond eyes, and that sliver of a birthmark running down the bridge of your nose like a horse's blaze. You were pretty suave for a guy in diapers. You used to sit on my girlfriends' laps and stare solemnly at them till they laughed and said, "He's gonna be a heartbreaker!"

My girlfriends were probably right about your future lady-killer status, but that will come later, when you're older, more sure of yourself. For now, it's *your* heart that I'm worried about.

See, you're a lot like me. In a word: sensitive. In three words: sensitive late bloomer. Sensitive late bloomers like ourselves may charm elders with cautious (but deep) affection, but we are apt to spend the first couple of decades of our lives being tragically misunderstood by our peers. Take, for example, the girl you're all broken up over. As I write this, I can already guess that she's the opposite of you—an early bloomer, one of those born-radiant beings surrounded, always, by concentric rings of friends, hangers-on, distant admirers. She is obviously too blinded by her own light to see yours. And, kid, you've got a light.

As your mother, a.k.a. Protector of the Light, I consider it my sacred duty to make sure that this occasion is ultimately a positive development. As that old Cat Stevens song you've never heard of says, "The first cut is the deepest." How you treat that cut now can make all the difference in how your whole self heals—and how life itself feels from here on.

This is the treatment I recommend: (1) Go somewhere beautiful and have a good cry. (2) Download Morrissey's "Viva Hate" (it will stand the test of time) and play it at a deafening volume in your bedroom nonstop for a maximum of three weeks. (3) Torch every memento of the relationship in a backyard bonfire (a parent must be present). (4) Begin to feel hopeful.

I must underscore that last point: Whoever she is, Finneus, however shiny her hair or light her step or silvery her laugh, the very fact of her should be cause for your hope, not your despair.

Just think: You've had emotions you didn't know you could have. For that reason, I won't go to her house and insist she return the expensive gift you spent your gas money on to try to win her. Because we have something more expensive: We see beauty in even the darkest times. Our pain doesn't put us to sleep; it wakes us up, reminds us to keep looking for a happiness that will outshine it.

P.S.: Ask Grandpa to play you Cat Stevens on his old-timer stereo. You may never be the same after.

Genevieve Field is the editor of the collection Sex and Sensibility: 28 True Romances From the Lives of Single Women.

