



Death Cab for Cutie

"Tiny Vessels"

*Transatlanticism*

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Munich Records

# The Outcast Loser™ and the Popular Boy™

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Will Vagle was the only boy I've ever loved, but it turned out I never loved him. He knew I existed. So don't think it's the classic "girl wishes boy would notice her" tale. But we were the typical "lonely girl falls madly in love with Popular Boy™ for no logical reason" story. I used him to replace the mushy daydreams I created all throughout primary school—we met in sixth grade, and parted ways after graduation. We had only talked, in person, maybe seven times. And each time my heart exploded, atriums bursting and ventricles pulsing beyond their limits. Online, we'd had a few more conversations, each contributing to my endless stream of daydreams that he would finally see that me, a shy girl, was worth getting to know.

But no. The Popular Boy™ of Mansfield, Texas, could not finish those daydreams, because there was never an opportunity to do so. Because we were going to different colleges, had different majors, and would eventually move to different states, I put my love aside, trying to find other guys to hold my attention; but I always came back to Will. His Facebook was my newspaper. I had a regular subscription.

I tried to forget about him. Really. There was no point in crushing on a guy who went to school four hours away from my own. The only chance of a run-in would be on breaks, and even then we both traveled outside of Mansfield during those times to Colorado or California. And every time that happened, I fantasized us meeting up somehow, in a coffee shop in Colorado Springs or serendipitously driving alongside each other on Interstate 10 in New Mexico. My brain doused itself in sequined visions, failing to see the reality of dull and nonexistent truths.

There was absolutely no reason for me to love him. I never really got to know Will—I didn't know what he liked to do in his free time or what his favorite sport was or where he shopped. Those stupid Disney Channel movies where the script follows an unknown kid's obsession over some hot person influenced me, and I felt because no one of a lower social status liked me, I had to reach for the top of the chain. It was my destiny to go through school stuck on one guy who never went out of his way to talk to me (in person, at least). I used him as a supporting character in my fantasies. In our history class with a substitute, I imagined us ignoring the chapter on the American Revolution and sharing an earbud to a romantic song. At 1 a.m. on lonely nights I'd look at his Facebook and silently wish he'd message me about homework or whatever.

None of these were real. None of these ever happened.

Except one event did happen. And that's why I kept all hope chained to the idea it could've happened again.

We both had YouTube channels that were regularly used to listen to music. Somewhere along the way I impulsively messaged him about a musician he liked, and he responded. The most popular guy in school took the time to message me, a nobody! We chatted about David Gray, what tracks we liked best, etc. I went berserk when he remembered my favorite song and sang it to me the next day in home room, which was in a computer lab.

I had to move one seat over because some kid needed a file off my computer. I grew nervous—that meant I had to sit next to Will, where he could see me, where I could see him, and I wasn't particularly ready for that. Loving him from a distance was fine, I couldn't disappoint myself if I were to look up and see he wasn't looking back at me. I switched spots and opened my book. Then the song began. Will's voice wasn't anything special, but it was so special to me that he remembered, that he did so while the whole class jabbered away about something else, and even though I didn't, couldn't, look at him, I smiled so hard. For that month I was happy. I was happy someone had walked into my daydreams and knew their script. I didn't have to imagine it that time. I was another fool in line.

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We were in the same row for graduation, eight last names apart. But I didn't see him as we cluttered onto the stage, hot under our gowns and tripping over nervous students' stumbles. I wondered if he thought he would miss me. Miss seeing that random girl dipping in and out of the yearbook room, lugging a bat from the softball fieldhouse, waiting at the corner by the art classes for her friends. I'd miss hearing his voice answer a question in our economics class and watching him study while his friends ate lunch. I'd miss seeing him and the undeserved adrenaline rush galvanizing my heart.

That night, I bravely and recklessly posted a picture on Facebook with "I wish I had it in me to walk up to you at graduation and say I had liked you for what seems like my entire life" scrawled on scraps of notebook paper on top of a crowd releasing their caps. In the caption was a seven-paragraph letter confessing my love for a certain Popular Boy™. It's possible he read it. I didn't say his name, but it was implied. Obvious. Clearly about Will. He was beautiful, after all.

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While cleaning out shitty drafts before my second year of college, I came across over twenty written daydreams, tiny vessels of my love for Will. I cringed. Sappy words, saccharine settings of dancing in wheat fields to no music, highly unrealistic overnight-type dates where we wound up in a park and slept on the hood of his car. I mean, it's all your stereotypical Outcast Loser™ lusting after the most popular boy of school kind of diary entries. Nothing would ever happen. Not the words I wanted to hear from any boy, not the smiles I wanted to see directed at me.

I had left a draft unfinished. The scenario was based on a true near-collision. I was in the Neighborhood Wal-Mart, checking out at 6, looking like a slob in the disgusting summer heat. As I backed away from the conveyor belt to grab a water, I spotted Will carrying a half-gallon of milk, walking toward me. Eye contact. For two seconds, all my love spilt into the humming air between the cash registers clicking and scanners beeping, and there was a silent pop inside my heart. He looked so beautiful, just ambling through a grocery store.

I had stopped writing there, on the note that he came up to me and asked if we could hang out at the Starbucks across the street in a few hours. I'm not sure why I didn't finish the story. The night before I had written a scenario where we ran into each other on vacation and split away from our families to go hiking, found a waterfall, swam, sappy kisses, and hiked back under the stars. And of course, in that dream everything was lovely and brilliant and happy. A reminder that what I want is not what I can have.

But I am going to do it now, while the feelings are still here, still fragmented, still alive. I loved him. I am sure of it. The language will be pretty. The scene will be like an indie film. I know my ending.

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A fictionalized Will and I sat at a table by the drive-thru, where the streetlights streamed in sepia, and my heart should've glowed along with the lamps, but it didn't. Will asked me about the letter I posted on Facebook. I couldn't deny it was about him.

*"But it made no sense," I said after a few blank seconds. "I don't think I was actually in love with you." Will looked puzzled, offended, astounded. What, the Popular Boy™ wasn't really loved by everyone? Shocking. "I don't mean to insult you, but it's all hitting me at this exact moment that I was blind for the past eight years."*

And that's when I realized, to myself outside of paper, outside of my stupid imagination, that I liked the idea of loving Will. Going through high school single, dateless to prom, seeing all the couples smear themselves over each other, made me want some sort of filler to compensate for the feelings I got. Because romantic comedies had molded me into a hopeless romantic, I figured I may as well cast myself as the Outcast Loser™. Will was already the perfect boy, the one every girl wanted, the one every guy tried to be. But I never got to know him.

I go back to Word and my fingertips are typing in various keys, flowing steadily of the newfound revelation. I am free from the stereotypes of high school rom-coms! I don't need to be the goddamn Outcast Loser™ anymore!

*"For some reason, I use people until there's nothing left to use. I used you to cover what I wanted romantically. Casted you in daydreams where it is like this right now, in a coffee shop underneath the streetlights. It was all the idea of it. And when I tried to make up our relationship, just from randomly seeing you in the hallway or in the parking lot after our history class, I couldn't imagine what it was like to really be with you. To be close to you. To watch your favorite movies under a warm blanket. To have you text me at two in the morning that I'm beautiful. To jump in the car with you to chase a sunset. I couldn't put myself in that place, the place I desperately wanted to be in. It all felt wrong."*

I have so much love to give, but I need to give it to the right person. Will deserves love, of course—everyone does—but I need the love I'm willing to spend in return, and the realistic Will could never give me that.

*"So I don't think I was ever in love with you. Just the thought of you. And I so badly wish I hadn't flung myself out there for you to see, to save me from this embarrassment and false start."*

I wish I could tell Will all of this in real life. He knew I liked him. I made it too obvious during all our encounters—I blushed, stuttered if he asked me something, or simply ran away when I saw him draw closer toward me. I tortured myself over every little missed opportunity I had passed. I didn't deserve the fallacy of this infatuation.

If I were to imagine him right now, sitting at the edge of that Starbucks, drinking whatever coffee it is that he orders, I would not say his brown eyes glistened from the streetlamps. I would not say his smile, beaming and bright, incited cliché butterflies in my stomach. I would say that Will Vagle was beautiful, but he didn't mean a thing to me.