

# Resilience, etc.

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At 25 I had my first panic attack. It lasted for three weeks and I called it heartbreak, mistaking the freedom for abandonment.

And it was that three-week panic attack that landed me in an examination room on an early summer afternoon. The scale told me I weighed 20 pounds less. The doctor told me I would benefit from psychotropics. Something about “situational depression” rang in my ears, echoing deep in the pulses that had been filling my ribcage.

*I hear your heart beating in your chest*

*The world slows till there's nothing left*

Sleep was a fleeting memory, weeks away by the time I walked into the pharmacy to fill the prescription. I supplemented my medicinal intervention with that of the musical kind, seeking anything that could take me out of my own head, even if only momentarily.

*High as Hope* came out a week after the breakup, and Florence Welch’s mellifluous voice floated through my headphones for weeks. On repeat, the album had an emotional healing power that couldn’t be found in orange pill bottles, in an empty shot glass, or in the writhing arms of a stranger.

*I thought that love was in the drugs*

*But the more I took, the more it took away*

*And I could never get enough*

Then I completely forgot about it—as if that album and its accompanying catharsis were wiped clean from my memory, along with everything else that happened during the nearly three months I handled my heartbreak. It was a time of zero self-care and copious amounts of alcohol. It was destruction before recovery. It was a mourning period. It was an afterword and a preface all in one.

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Backtrack a few months to February. I’d thought that therapy would help me avoid any of the deeply visceral effects of a relationship that had been in decline from the time it started. After an anniversary trip turned sour and a four-hour bus ride in silence back to New York, I knew I needed to work on something. If he wouldn’t change, I could, or at least I could start to.

*I thought that love was a kind of emptiness*

My therapist posed one question at the end of our first session: What do you want? It was simple, really: I wanted to have a relationship that felt secure. I wanted to remove the anticipation of an argument when my boyfriend and I had even the most mundane of conversations. I wanted to feel like myself again. Naming these things made one thing clear to me, even then.

This relationship needed to end.

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Florence + the  
Machine

“June” / “Hunger”

*High as Hope*

06/2018

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According to the CDC, 43 million women have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner, defined as “the use of verbal and non-verbal communication with the intent to harm another person mentally or emotionally and/or exert control over another person.”

Identifying the cycle of psychological abuse in your own relationship is a unique challenge. I knew the irrationality of my ex threatening self-harm if I didn’t adopt the honorific of “girlfriend” only two weeks after we had met. Or when he begged for forgiveness after fucking a girl he met at a party I’d hosted, only to shame me for having had sex with other men in my bed before him.

The signs were all there, but the delusion of being cared for clouded any idea of getting out. It was nice to have someone there for me after getting out of a late-night class, someone to cook dinner while I pieced together the reporting that would eventually be my master’s thesis. On the condition of companionship, I gave up my will to be my own person, placating to his every demand.

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A drink. A fight. A text message. After two years, it all came down to that. While I wish I could say I had the confidence to end things on my own, I didn’t. Instead, it was like someone had hit the eject button and it sent me reeling, without a parachute, into reality.

I was escaping the city for a weeklong vacation, and the argument my ex and I had before I left was messy, explosive. It was the first time I made my feelings apparent, no longer tip-toeing around the lofty expectations set by someone else. Each day I was away was filled with conversations of conviction—I don’t want to break up, but I can’t do this anymore. Neither of us were giving in or giving up, dancing around the inevitable, still holding on to something far gone.

*In those heavy days in June  
When love became an act of defiance*

“I think we need to break up,” was the text I woke up to on the final day of my trip. My calls and texts wouldn’t go through, blocked, cutting off what had regrettably been my lifeline for far too long. In a hopeful way, I never reciprocated, never blocked his number. Some high-horse way of being the bigger person. Then the texts started to trickle in, lingering attempts at wielding control.

June 25: “good luck with your life you cunt”

July 1: “I’m so happy without you”

July 8: “Fuck you”

November 27: “You’re pathetic”

I finally reciprocated the blocking.

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At 26, almost exactly one year after breaking up, I found myself alone in a crowd of thousands at a festival, and that mellifluous voice began:

*The show was ending and I had started to crack*

It was "June" in June, and I was reminded in real-time how much that Florence + the Machine album changed me. Tears started to well in my eyes, involuntarily. My soul finally released any lingering emotions that got buried with those months of forgotten memories.

It was catharsis.

It was therapy.

It was release.