

The “J” stands for Julien Baker and the rest is moving on.

J. David

It takes exactly 94 minutes to drive from my house to Sharon, PA. Enough time to listen to thirty-five repetitions of *Something*. I find myself, whenever my Schizophrenia gets bad, measuring distances by the number of plays *Something* gets between Point A and Point B. I discovered this song, and the artist, Julien Baker, when E left me the first time. During my grieving period, I was adamant—love was a fool’s favorite pastime or something stupid people had convinced themselves could cure existential loneliness. And the truth is, on some level, I still believe that. But in Sharon, PA, there is a girl who glows like light from distant shapes; who for a second, maybe, convinced me otherwise.

E had left me for the second time and I had given up entirely on the idea that anyone could coexist with my particular flavor of madness, even despite the fact I was now on Lithium and as psychologically stable as I had ever been. I stumbled through a succession of short and poor romantic trysts in an attempt to *put myself out there again and maybe meet someone cool that’ll take your mind off of missing E*, as one friend suggested. But the thing is, I don’t miss her, I never missed her in any way you’re supposed to miss someone you dated for four years. She was just plain shitty and neglectful the last seven months we dated. So, once far enough away from the situation to see clearly, I lamented the person she became and possessed no desire to ever see or speak to her again. The fact that my paramour had so destabilized me, coupled with a parade of unfortunate dating experiences, had left me jaded and really fucking bitter. But god—there she was, in Sharon, PA, physically eclipsing the sun when I leaned a certain way and strumming a guitar.

I regret having expectations for memory. I know I can never truly capture magnitude or momentum inside its corridors. But there is something to be said in defense of its praise. And I praise the memory of leaning like a dumbass, having forgotten sunglasses, using the bodies of others to shield the sun, when the first chords of *Something* shuddered their way from the guitar at the front of the coffee shop. And in that moment, I thought *there’s a bigger picture thing happening*. As in, I have run out of fingers and toes on which to count the number of times *Something* has saved my life on nights I wished myself evaporated. It would make sense then, that whatever moment I finally decided to move on and stop trying to replace the person I imagined E should’ve become, would have something to do with *Something*.

I don’t believe that’s the case for everything that ever happens, that somehow, a greater force has orchestrated its occurrence. Most things are inconsequential. But yes, at some moments there must be a greater force at work. Is it predestined? Maybe not. I think on some level the universe or god or some powerful equations governing the equations that govern us must be accompanying us in this life as we live it. That doesn’t mean things immediately are meant to be. It’s a 50/50 toss-up for me on that. And I’d like to hope that love doesn’t happen on accident but I’m suspicious that maybe it does. Either way, I almost tell the girl playing guitar that I’ve *maybe got feelings for you*, which would make her the first since E, and something I was praying would never happen again in defense of my heart—but I let her speak first. At which point, in more words than less, she



JULIEN BAKER *SPIRAINED ANKLE*

Julien Baker

“Something”

Sprained Ankle

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explains *you're a day too late to start falling in love with me*. I get the message. But for the time before she reunited with her *One That Got Away*, I smiled at her texts, and sang in the shower, and spent Thursday nights dancing in the rain at 2 AM. And I didn't know how much I missed that— how much I missed believing in love.

The truth of the matter is, for so long I was consumed with the idea of who I should be with. A thousand gasping mouths gossiping ideas into my ears. I was convinced, it should be a person like the person I spent four years with. Each time it failed in the same ways as the last ones had. That, or I would strive to find someone as distant from E as Andromeda's galaxy. You see the problem, now don't you? Either way I was dictated by their proximity to E. But this time felt different. Like somehow I had replaced any preconceived notions of how or why attachments should form and to whom. It felt like I had somehow circumnavigated my Borderline Personality Disorder and let go of past trauma, and for a moment fell for the girl in Sharon, PA. She had invited me there to hear her sing and I had gone gladly, expecting to quietly read while she played on. I got more than I bargained for in the best way—I got the right song at the right time and an afternoon of rapt attention directed at music. So maybe the purpose of this moment wasn't to be some sort of fantasy fulfillment of finally moving on. Maybe this moment was to teach me I am still capable of falling in love, and in a healthy way. A reminder that someday I will move past the hurt E left in her wake or that, in the end, as the earth burns, my bones will warm in ways more than just simple apocalypse.

So tonight, I am going to drive to my favorite field in the middle of nowhere and lay in the grass. I will whisper to a premonition. I will whisper to a person I haven't met yet but that I'm starting to believe might could possibly, maybe, just maybe—should *definitely* have to exist; and I will tell them:

I can feel the vibrations / when you pluck the strings / called joy,
everything is thrumming / can you hear it? The stars, / they are laughing at us.