

Comfort Within Our Uncertainty

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In TJ Jarrett's poem, "Late That Summer," the speaker describes her evening sitting around a table with her friends. She begins the poem with fireflies buzzing around her as she and a couple friends reminisce on their pasts. The speaker tells of some unspoken betrayal within an old relationship, causing her to only observe as the others stalk the current lives of previous lovers. One friend cries in her hands over her remarried ex-husband, while another makes a crude joke to cover his true emotions. The poem ends with the speaker and her friends sitting in a somber silence, regretting the impulse of searching old relationships. In the poem, "Late That Summer," the moment of most uncertainty occurs while the speaker is sitting around with friends, feeling sadness as she and her friends reminisce on previous lovers.

Every person has experienced the impulse to look up someone from their past on the internet. From old friendships, fall-out family members, and forgotten exes, the desire to know how someone from your past is doing is not uncommon. Joy is not an initial feeling when you discover that someone has moved on. Insecurities arise as you start to compare yourself to their new lover and think back on what went wrong. Could you have prevented it? These overwhelming thoughts and regrets are a natural part of being human.

The speaker writes, "We looked down at our phones / and we looked up old loves" (Jarrett 4-5). As the speaker tells us this story, it is not difficult to imagine ourselves in that same situation. Whether it's through sadness, anger, or regret, we can relate to this friend group sitting around the table. We often make snarky or humorous comments such as "Look how fat she is" (14) or "see how happy they are without us" (18) to try and distract our mind from the gut wrenching feeling of losing a loved one.

Jack Underwood writes about uncertainty and people's complicated relationship to it in an essay called, "On Poetry and Uncertain Subjects." In his essay, Underwood offers the idea that when a person feels as though they've finally figured out the strategy to surviving this earth, they discover how little they know. Underwood writes, "We all encounter stalling moments of uncertainty when the strategies we have developed for ourselves and each other fail to console the overwhelming complexity and unpredictability of being alive with everything else on earth" (Underwood). We as Americans find fulfillment in the idea of a "perfect family." We work to shift our perspective and mindset to involve a romantic relationship. Your body and soul work together to adjust to a life with them that makes sense, "as if somehow our minds pertain toward a special clarity" (Underwood). The common issue we as humans run into is the uncertainty within relationships. People are always changing, making our relationships and the ideas we've built around them unpredictable. We spend so much time with a person, convinced that we "are literally made for each other" (Underwood). It only takes a moment for that presumed lifelong partner to become "farther / than distance" (7-8), to watch them "close that door and latch it resolutely" (10).

When hurt, abandoned, or betrayed, we often search for the reasoning behind it; *we want to know why*. Underwood tells us in his essay that one of the first things he teaches his students is to “understand how and why they cannot know” (Underwood) and to treat that as “the only true wisdom” (Underwood). Rather than striving to know everything about what something is, we should strive to know everything about what something is not. By wanting to know how their ex-lovers were doing, the speaker and her friends ended up causing themselves more pain. At the end of the poem, the friend group sat around the table watching as “insects drawn to fire / fell into hot wax never to escape” (19-20). Similarly, we often get ourselves stuck in a place where we are unable to escape. We strive and struggle for answers when we are uncertain, only to find sadness and disappointment. Perhaps instead of yearning for knowledge, we should find comfort within our uncertainty.

Works Cited

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