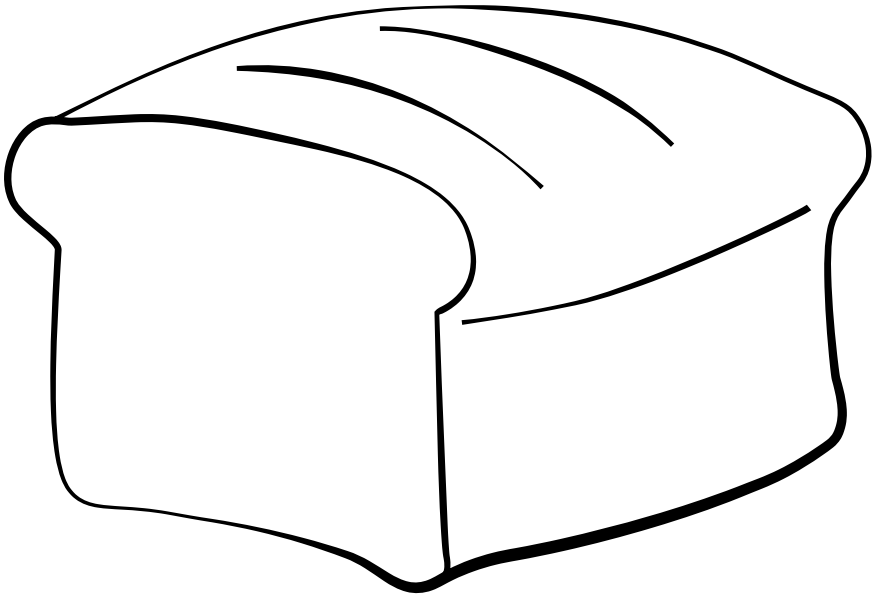


b^{think} r^Ie a^{we}k^{up}

Lewis Figun Westbrook



A chapbook about taking a break,
being broken and maybe breakups

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the first draft of this poem really was a love poem

I think you broke me and I think I've said that sentence way too many times. Broken as in I almost threw up at my friend's house, as in I had to call my mom's friend to bring me applesauce and ginger ale cause there was nothing else I was willing to eat, as in I am home alone for a week and I thought I was mature enough to survive it

You've been in my dreams for three days in a row now and I just wish you were here, wish someone was here

I think you first broke me when you changed my name to My Love and I could see it, but maybe it started with that first message about my A plus music taste. Maybe it was different from the beginning and you flooded me with feelings

It was easy to ignore the first time

I think you broke me again when you said you couldn't tell if I was being serious which lead me to believe you were being serious. You said nevermind when I told you I was confused.

I was very confused.

Did you know that it's almost impossible to still not believe something after you have heard it a million times. That's why conspiracy theories get so popular, that's why the people who are hired to find and take them down start to join them

I think you broke me the third time when you sent that first winky face. We then agreed I did not understand what you meant, but you had faith. I had none

I broke for the fourth time when you sent the definition of a winky face and I pointed out the or between humorous and flirtatious. I didn't want to believe you I didn't want to believe myself

I believed I was already broken, that's what I called it on days I was lonely. Days before I ever had a romantic crush that could possibly go somewhere. See if you know your feelings won't ever get more than a high five there's no reason to focus on them

You broke me the fifth time when we talked about stethoscopes touching

chests and lips touching lips. Heart beats running fast. I couldn't help but admit I wanted to try it too and that I was curious where one could get a stethoscope. Again you asked if I was being serious. This time I said yes. This time you broke me so strong that my whole bed was damp. Damp because I was shaking so much my body worked like a lawn sprinkler and I had enough sweat to become a pond.

You broke me a sixth time when I woke up at five AM to paragraphs about your thoughts. I've always liked your thoughts.

You broke me means you made me feel when I thought I was too broken to
Too asexual too

Smart the way I convinced myself

I was mistaking melting for breaking, anticipating a hit to come after a fall

But of course that's just the adrenaline talking

Cause falling feels like flying and flying gets mistaken for melting all the time and the ground just hurts more when it's a surprise

So yes you both broke me and melted me

And I did fall for you

Did eventually believe

But there will always be the ground

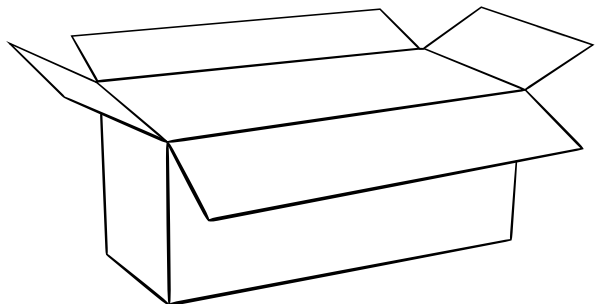
And I will always scrape the skin on my right knee completely gone while I am riding a bike behind my house

I thought I was cool like a kid in a movie, the way I shifted back and forth while standing on the pedals, an attempt at fantasy

I stopped shifting as much after that

So call me a pessimist or realist but I can't just put a scar in a box of your things for my friend to hold onto

I can't let go of everything



Take them back

Or away

I still think about them sometimes

Like when they wiped my tears away from my face

They were kind of crying too

The pleading idea of sloping

Of pulling the tears back or away

Falling from their lips

Awkward laughs too that travel down trails already made and wet

My shoulders shake

both when I laugh and when I cry

And people used to get them confused all the time when I was a child

Always asking

My ex never asked me if I was crying

Just checked under my eyes

Felt my soft skin and brushed my eyelashes

I've been trying not to think about them

Ignore all the notifications I get when they like a tweet

It's kind of hard not to think about them

To not obsess if I am allowed to make this joke that used to be exclusively theirs

If I can ever say I love you more

Without hearing more in their voice

If I can ever talk about fireflies

Without seeing their eyes light up

If I can ever watch John Mulaney

Without listening to their laugh as the backtrack

If I can ever say I made a joke because I cracked you up

Without saying it in their cadence

Can I still share something about them when we are not sharing a life?

They were so kind then

As they dried my tears

And chuckled when neither of us could stop
And I still listen to the music they sent me
Remember how the first playlist they made had my deadname
And they never had any problems switching to Lewis
I remember getting cards that said pronoun indifferent on them
Back when I was pronoun indifferent
And how I really did like their laugh a lot
And their smile
And when they weren't trying so hard to be attractive
I remember having history with someone
And not having to explain my life story
I remember knowing what I loved about them
But I am not even sure what I miss
I am not sure why I miss them
It's so much easier when I don't think about them
When I don't have to wonder if I am missing them enough
If I loved them enough
If I fought for them enough
Easy as in I don't have to hate anyone
Or blame anyone, easy like I can let go
I just want to let go without feeling guilty about letting go
I don't have to wonder where I went wrong
When I am too busy to miss them
When there are no tears for them to rub away

Absorption

I take a shower half an hour before you break up with me
It's easier to pretend I am crying when everything else is soaked
And it's not like I can continually check my phone
When it is in another room
I could tell
I could tell for almost a whole week that it was coming
Maybe even longer than that
And I couldn't stop it
I didn't try that hard
I mean what was I supposed to do?
I heard you go quiet whenever I talked about my life
Witnessed you freeze and felt an ache in my chest
The bones the way they wrap and prepetate to hug themself
Am I supposed to stop telling you things?
Am I supposed to ask you if you are okay again?
What if you still say yes very time
What if I just make you not okay but saying it over and over again?
I can't force you to talk to me and I didn't want to
So I felt the storm brewing
And did not bother hiding under a tree
But I don't think I grabbed an upside down steel umbrella either
I didn't keep the fake teats in a pouch
Or collect them for when I might need them again
I just let it all wash over my skin
And I didn't bother washing my body or hair
There was no reason to make it useful
Or explain or defend it
Maybe it is your teats that are rushing over me
Forcing me to pretend I am crying too
As you tell me the news
See I always thought the 'we should talk' conversation starter never made

sense

Did I say anything on that call besides okay?

Was it a conversation or you breaking

The press release, dropping the

End of a series, last ever album

And I am forced to witness it

Find conversations with friends all cover it

And I just absorb every word

Smile so they will stop talking

So that I don't have to have another are you okay

Stuck in my head

Or another I'm sorry on replay

I am not sorry and I am okay

But I am still fucking sad

Riddles

My first week of college I tell riddles

One being Tom and Tim go to a restaurant

They both order the same thing

Same drink same food, exactly the same

Tom eats it slow, Tim eats it fast

Tom dies

Why?

You are allowed to ask yes or no questions only

Do you want to break up?

No

Are you losing hope?

Yes

Are you afraid?

Yes

See the poison is in the ice

See slow consumption is worse

That's why you texting me everyday after the breakup hurt so much

You broke up with me and now you want me to stick around

Wait for the ice to melt

The fun thing about ice melting is once it's done

You still feel it for a while

Grab glass with cold sweat like mid-night-mates-wake-up

Grab every good memory of you and hold it in my chest

Do you miss them?

Yes

Are you going to text them?

No

Do you feel the buzz and burn?

Yes

The best way to drink water is room temperature, it's lets you hydrate faster

Funny the way we feel like the thing that is worse for us is better

Funny the way I don't know if I should let myself text you

You text me

Yes

Ask me to pay you back for the time you visited me

And I can't help but think of my friends poem

I venmo my abuser after Catelyn Brazelton

Are you venmo requesting me?

Irrelevant

Do you still love me?

Irrelevant

Irrelevant as in I can solve the riddle without it

As in I do not know the answer

As in it doesn't change anything

I do not reply to you within twenty-four hours

I let the ice melt before I get there

Hope it's ugly warmth by the time it leaves my lips

Then it will not hurt, then we will have a healthy conversation

My first week of high school a friend showed me

How if you hold an ice cube on salt to your skin

It burns extra, leaves marks and

Un-colors and un-covers new bruises

And risks 3rd degree burn

As in we do not talk to each other

I am not sure who was the one hurt so bad they do not talk to the other

Not sure who threw the first pound of salt on to the sidewalk between our houses

Or threw the first pound of salt in our text threads

But here we are slowly melting farther from each other

Don't Go, a song you sent me plays right before Better By Myself
which maybe feels a bit too much like our relationship

Hey [REDACTED]
You [REDACTED] leave [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] return [REDACTED] what's [REDACTED]
Bounce back, [REDACTED]

And I don't [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ask [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
You [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] to [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] go
I'll never [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] break, [REDACTED] it [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] won't [REDACTED]
Call [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] you [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] to [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] go

[REDACTED] make it on my own
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I pushed you to [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[redacted] never [redacted]

[redacted] worry, [redacted]

It's not the end, [redacted]

[redacted] right [redacted]

It's not the end, [redacted]

Don't [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] push [redacted] to [redacted]

[redacted] go

2,

[redacted] be [redacted]

[redacted] here in California [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] it's [redacted] used me

Watered [redacted] me

[redacted] criticized me [redacted]

[redacted]

Would you [redacted] if I told you

[redacted] never [redacted] speak to [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] city [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] better [redacted]

[redacted] be [redacted]

[redacted] better [redacted] better [redacted] better [redacted]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] wear [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] old [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] confidence [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] when [REDACTED]

You're [REDACTED] go [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] in [REDACTED] e [REDACTED]

I'm better [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

You're [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] better [REDACTED]

Woo

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] better [REDACTED] better [REDACTED] better [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] better [REDACTED] better [REDACTED] better [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] better [REDACTED] better [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] better [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] better b [REDACTED]

Roses

I never wrote you a love poem
About the way you smell like roses
Cause I'm not sure exactly what you smell like, a mixture of long distance
and I guess being me
I've met people with distinct smells before could walk into their house blindfolded
and know
You just weren't one of them
Maybe that's it, what caused this I couldn't follow you like a dog by smell
And we never did have leashes tied to each other
See I felt more fireworks in my chest
From the aching of crying so hard you can't breathe than I did when we first kissed
I feel more electricity at the idea of standing in front of a crowd
Than I ever did with a touch
So far every first kiss has lead to me throwing up the next day
And I'm tired of seeing the inside of my stomach on the outside of a toilet
I am tired of that smell
All yellow and wrong, Spoiled from every movie I have seen
I wanted to kiss someone in the rain and came up with fog stuck between my teeth
I wanted to hold someone's hand on a bus and found a railing with gum
grabbing my palm
I wanted to pull a stereo above my head and discovered sharing earbuds means
someone is always missing out
I am sorry I never wrote you a poem about the way you smell like roses
That I do not believe you smell like roses
And I am sorry I don't have a list of reasons we should stay together, just a
list of moments I don't like telling my friends
Because I am worried about what they will think
And if I leave this in the dark
I can still pretend it is a dream, the good kind

Where my ex breaks up with me the weekend before finals and I
don't process it until I have two days in a row where I do nothing
and see no one

I have a fucking ex

My first ever ex

I think I passed all my classes though

Edit from future me: I did

So that's cool that's cool

Do you know what it's like to feel like you can't be sad?

Not because you shouldn't

But because you are listening to sad songs and your chest keeps shaking,
heaving

You make that ugly face everyone does

But your cheeks are still peeling

Dry skin flaking

Flaking on every meal you are supposed to eat

Cause your solution is distraction

And sometimes you get so distracted you miss important things

Do you know what's worse than an ex that doesn't look back?

One that finds an excuse to text you everyday

Like to tell you their mom put peanut butter cups on their face when they
took a depressive nap

My mom is in another state

And my ex broke up with me

Like texts that tell you that they are actually doing better?

Better better-better-better

Move on quick so they can still send you poems

Better move on quick so you can delete all the silly photos of them

They text you to tell you that they feel bad about you having to delete all those photos

But you hadn't thought about the fact that you should delete them

It didn't occur to you

Maybe I want to keep them

So yeah deleting upwards of 600 photos of them smiling while you are almost crying

Not fun

I've had to resist the urge to laugh every time I tell someone

Introduce the topic by 'want to hear about my not so fun weekend' with a smile on my face

I am still finding traces of them

It's been a week so I guess that's not surprising

But I forgot to take down the package they sent me

And there's a space on my wall that is now empty

And it's kind of easier to notice the blank space

Where I had once put the card they sent me

And I ask a friend to pick up the box of things I can't stare at anymore

Go and edit all the poems I was too afraid to touch

I can now say I have an ex

And it's not nearly as fun as when I could first say I was someone's boyfriend

I can now say I am learning what it's like to

miss someone while trying not to hate them

And it is not as fun as holding their hand for the first time

Or kicking their shoe when I saw them in person the very first time

Did you know I noticed them first?

It was in a cafeteria at a college in New York and I couldn't let myself be sure it was them

But I also couldn't pretend I didn't see them

So I walked up and kicked the shoe that had mismatched green laces

And they gave me a hug

I was so embarrassed that I said hi by kicking their shoe

But the kind of embarrassed that it became my favourite stories to tell

'I was just so nervous I kicked their shoe!'

I am never going to be able to kick another person's shoe

That's your heartbreaking image, nervous me saying hi for the first time

Stuck in my head as I am saying bye for the last

I am just so confused what being on a break means

Did you know that the word breakfast

Legit came from breaking your fast

Meant morning meals before midnight snacks were a thing

You were breaking the hunger that grew overnight

Breaking bread to pass over

To friends

In this case it means ending a bad thing and starting anew

I have never broken a bone

But my brother did

Fractured his wrist and wore a green cast for four weeks

Rulers and pencils lost while trying to break his itch away

The arm was thin after signatures were sawed off

The scar was different than the sharp black messages

In this case it means ending a good thing and being forced to start anew

School breaks have never actually been good for me

Found summers in beds and lost winters to a family that doesn't know my name

Never did anything productive without a deadline

And took naps in the middle of the day that I never recovered from

In this case it means ending a good thing and waiting to start anew

Waiting so long for someone else's decision their calendar

I get so restless

I had a teacher who once broke her whole fingernail off

It fell to her feet and she couldn't hold mugs anymore

She couldn't even place her hand on a table without a sting

And seven year old me couldn't stop imagining pinky flesh all liquefied and unstable

She called it raw and I saw squealed, she called it painful and I saw

beating movements

She said

You never know how much something like that does, how useful a fingernail is

In this case it means ending an overlooked thing and waiting to start anew

Or waiting to go back to normal and overlooking it all again

You call blocking me on social media a break

Call blocking my phone number the same

And I am not sure what it means in this case

If this is a good thing or bad thing

If we survive this

What happens when the break ends?

Are we starting anew? Or just preparing to overlook everything all over again?

I am not sure I've ever been broken before

Skin peeled away from bone leaves scars I think

Broken textures end with fingers over glass windows I think

I have red on my hands, embedded deep under fleshy plastic

Have white too

And I'll hold my weak wrists up like our favourite flags

Spring time

White cells attacking threat-less invasion
This is allergies on an almost spring morning
On a I sneeze so hard my breathing is off
And I keep coughing up mucus greens
I watch the way it separates in fish bowl water
Watch DNA split open
You've always had an effect on my body
Just not the kind people expect
I learned that this mucus green is from lack
I didn't eat today and now I see
The absence in the bowl
Empty cereal water, hold the honey, the sweet
ie, sweetie get some sleep
And hold it far away from the bathroom door
But keep a not yet grown pot on you
Just in case you can start something
You can end something too
But that means you have to admit something started in the first place
And this is from lack, right?
This is not enough
This is, this isn't, this us
And is has I but us has you, this means
We aren't anything anymore, right?
That's why I am spilling guts on scroll type paper
Cause I haven't talked to you today
And if I did I'd be taking cucumbers to my eyes
Salt salad spill
And dressing always comes out too fast anyway
Just like coughing means you can't breath
And I can't breath so often
Not while I can hear you intake already

Your take on our relationship progress

Lack of

Intake before you say famous last words

Not your famous last words

Just famous last words

Everyone knows what those are right

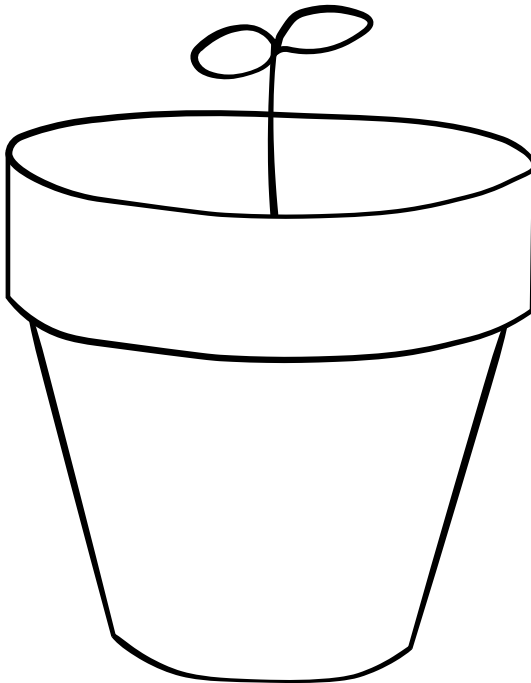
The conversation after 'we need to talk'

We did need to talk

But how many words do you have to trade for it to be a conversation?

And if I write hello on my hand and give it to you to hold

Will you not let go?



Night Dark

I set my twinkle lights to flicker
A rave
Warmth for a second
I like to see clearly
Just only so long that the dark doesn't scare me
Not long enough to catch details
It's kind of like it's not leaving me
It's kind of like it was never even there
And occasionally I'll blink at the same time
So I miss it
The light, the goodness, the fireworks
You know as a child I was terrified of the night
Terrified that while everyone else was asleep
A robber would come in and catch me
Or a monster would lurk in the corners of shadows
My solution back then
Was to pull my covers over my head
Or squeeze my eyes so tight that I'd see colors
Somehow that darkness was less scary
That darkness was mine, was controlled
Nothing could hide in that mystery
So I guess a part of myself gets it (why you broke up with me)
Why you wanted to go on a break
You felt that we weren't talking enough
I felt that the murk was holding secrets
You stop talking to me
I closed my eyes
I don't have to acknowledge what those secrets could be
If I can't see them just out of reach
You don't have to acknowledge that you think we are falling apart
If you don't see us together

I get it I think

There's risk in getting up to turn on the light

You are announcing that you are here

You might scare the monsters or attracted them

And I don't know what is worse

You might have to admit to yourself that we aren't working

Or sign up to fix it

And you don't know what is worse

So tear up the letter instead of replying

Delete all my text messages

It's okay I deleted some of yours too

Do not touch the light switch, do not acknowledge the cracks in the walls

It's not like I did either

Not like I tried to fix anything after the first break

The split, rupture, gap, call it what you want

I didn't fix anything

Just let myself not trust the walls anymore

And stopped leaning against them

Cause I knew if I did it would all come crashing down

A home that doesn't stand on it's own two feet

Makes you hold not only the roof but the floors too

And I stopped comparing this crowding to a hug

Stopped calling it a blanket I can pull over my head

When the dark gets too unsure

Now I keep my dorm locked

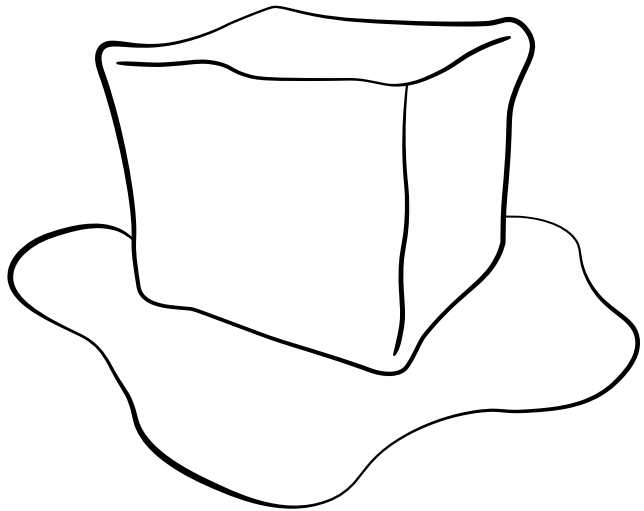
And sleep with a light under my pillow

So I never have to close my eyes again

Great Salt Lake

I wonder how I managed to cut my eyes
So now with tears of salt they sting like stepping into the dead sea
I live in Utah now
Where the great salt lake is
And rain is more like ice pelting
I wrote a story about acid droplets not too long ago
Hiding underground to save yourself every winter
Poison touch of cool metal warning
Also known as my laptop closing
As my phone on my chest melting
We always have these conversations late at night
Where I dissolve so much I have to do laundry the next day
And those metal machines are cold too
Scary the way they bump and bump
Go in circles spin
Everything so it is my fault
Let you blame me
I haven't had to kick open a frozen door yet
Nor have I been snowed in
But apparently Salt Lake City had its first snow day in nearly two decades my
first year here
And I think I want to blame myself for that too
Think that I change something with just a touch
That I corrupt
And when it comes back
When ice turned water melts
It still has a bitter raw aftertaste
After like I can still love you easy
If I am going to cry no matter what
If I expect my tongue to get stuck on silver barrier
Then I ask you

Tongue out, mouth open, words slipping to,
Hold a off-black hairdryer against my skin
Pretend that it's just like the warmth of holding your hand
Feel everything liquify with the heat
And I remember that childhood puzzle
About a puddle on the ground and a man with a rope
Necklace no one else in the room with him
Doors still locked
How did he get there?



How to catch a firefly

New Jersey boy who caught them in their free time

A story of childhood

I used to catch them

How I took

Medium square ziploc containers

With the blue lid

And square indents but the other way

How you catch fireflies in your hand first

Cupped around them

And ignore the doubt that you missed

Because the second you open your hands they will fly away

Then you transfer them into the container

Put a stick and a leaf in

Because that feels humane

To 8 year old you

And if your dad is home and not too tired from work

Get him to drill holes in the lid

One time he was too tired

And so mom told us that we had to let them go

Before we headed in for the night

But I hid it by the recycling bins

You know the next morning I went to check them

All slow moving and no longer lighting up

People call them lightning bugs

And here they were

No light no speed

People call it breakup sadness

Locking yourself in your room with ice cream

But maybe it feels like those fireflies

My old pet name for you

Stuck overnight after months
Of us being done
It's not quite missing you
But I knew that once
These thoughts about you had that flare
These thoughts meant glow
And now I'm not sure
I'm not sure what I am feeling as I think about how big your shoes were next
to mine and we sat on stairs
As I think about how enveloped I was in your hugs and how much taller you
are
As I think about your smile late on calls and the way your hair poofed around
your head

Okay

I think at this point I have written more break up poems about you than love poems

And I really wish that wasn't true

Really wish I could stop missing you

Stop writing about you

But I can't

I can't help but want to hold a chapbook in my hand

With a cover I've already made

And the only thing it will miss will be your name

And I will miss your face

Your weird humor

And how much you knew about me

Maybe it is stupid that I am making a chapbook about you

But I don't want to regret anything

And sometimes that means I have to remind myself what I learned

Hold a chapbook without your name, but your touch

I'm gonna call it growth

Mark the first draft with pen

So I can make sure it's good enough

And you were good enough

You did break up with me

And I can say that calmly this time

You broke up with me and I said okay

I will be okay

Author note:

The font used in this book is Last Standing and was created by Lewis Figun Westbrook using their handwriting. The poems and illustrations are also by Lewis Figun Westbrook.



Lewis Figun Westbrook (he and they) is a comedian first as it is a defense mechanism appropriate for any setting, and a writer second as it is a defense mechanism best saved for time alone in a room where they can cry all they want. They love puns, pretending they can do the sports and talking to people. Even though all of those things make them nervous. Find them on most social media: lewisllw

o | still
love | k | i'm fine
a | Don't
y | worry
ou