

Ode to You

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I am gazing at you as you lie next to me. The smell of old kisses lingers in the air, cool like stale rain. You are sleeping quietly beside me for once, eyelashes fluttering. It's the first time this week and I can feel the amber glow emanating off your body. For once, I am not shivering. I was beginning to think you were never coming home from tour. You've been gone for months and I've grown numb because of it. It feels as if my body is protesting against everything and everyone, it shrivels up like a raisin when anything comes near it, except for little Lilah and baby Jason, of course. It almost did that tonight because it forgot what you felt like. I remember when we first got married and I didn't know a minute without your touch. Your large, warm hand resting on my lap, fingers intertwined on my full belly as we watched TV. We lived in that house on Firefly Court, remember? I was pregnant with Lilah. Of course, those were the days before you became a musician. Before you became *someone* to everyone else, too. Suddenly I wasn't the only one who loved you with the same fervor I've had since those blistering days when we first met.

You had just come back from a day of work in the fields. I was writing in my favorite spot, the one under the only two shady weeping willows in the city. Only that day, it was so scorching that the willows forgot to weep. I was getting ready to leave when I saw you drive by in your truck. You caught my eye and smiled that crooked smile of yours, that same one that always stirred up a tornado inside me. I felt my insides spinning around and I knew they'd never be the same. The next day I went to my spot and waited for you, only you were nowhere to be found. I turned to leave when the hairs on the back of my neck stood on end. I swear, my body has always been able to feel you before seeing you. You put your hand on the skin of my back and I could feel your life in your callused hands. Diverging paths like a road map, rough to the touch. I knew I loved you right then. You whispered, *hi*, and trailed your hand up to my shoulder and down my arm the same way you did earlier tonight when you came back to me.

I've missed your touch. I still do. I'm not talking about your grabbing my wrist as if holding a leash or placing your hand carelessly on my stomach the way you did tonight. No. I'm talking about the soft pressure of your foot on mine as you sleep, soft like the ripple of rain in a pool of water. The swift brush of your hand across my ear as you move a strand of hair from my face. Or, my favorite, the smooth scrape of your lips across my collar, claiming me like plush silk.

But that all stopped after you became famous. Suddenly I wasn't the one who needed to be claimed. I'd watch you on our new television, singing to the crowds the way you had always sung to me. "Ode to You" was the song. I always thought your words were meant especially for me, like my very own brilliant spotlight coming from you, until I saw you bring a girl up from the crowd – she must have caught your eye earlier that night – and you sang to her the same way. I swear, you even gave her your trademark crooked smile in all the same parts of the song.

Now that you're *someone*, you've forgotten what it was like to be no one. Well, those were the good days. Back then, my house didn't look like a celebrity crib catalog, I didn't have a television or a fancy bed or a house three stories high. I had nothing, but it was everything because I had you – all of you.

My love. It was always something I kept tucked away in the deep hollows of my heart, until you came around and it snuck out when I wasn't looking. It latched onto you and it won't let go. Can't you feel my love gripping you the way a desperate child grips

her mother? It's still there. Or have you become immune to it? I know, you're basking in *her* love now – *Angenette*, was it? The girl you were singing to. Of course, she's a young version of me. Dark, Hershey colored hair, hazel brown eyes, and soft, strawberry lips. Completely your type, right? And, she has the body of someone who has never gone through pregnancy. Bonus.

Does she know your secrets the way I do, though? Does she know the precise wrinkles of your face as you have that recurring nightmare about your father? The way your bottom lip curls in and your hand grabs for me as your eyebrows crinkle in pain. Does she know the way the hairs on the back of your head curl up into plump ringlets when it's humid? God, I just want to wrap my fingers in those ringlets, the way a tree wraps itself in ivy. Those same ringlets Lilah and Jason got from their daddy. Does she know about Lilah and Jason? How your entire being melds into something different around them, something warmer and gentler like burning solid wax melds into something soft and liquefied. How you're the most beautiful man I have ever seen because he knows he has two little pieces of him on this earth.

For a while, I'd play that song of yours whenever I began to miss you. It's no use now, though. You've tainted it by singing it to *her*. I wish I could bring you back to me. Reign you in like a king to his crown. You used to call me that, remember? *My crown*, you'd say until I was giggling in your arms. Then you'd savor the sweet taste of my mouth with gentle little kisses at first, then, more passionate. Tonight, your kisses tasted different, though, like sour chocolate. Was it because *she* was still on your lips? Or was it someone else?

You've always been a loveable man. And even as you lie here next to me, not touching, I love you and the way your eyes quiver when I get close to you because you are here in my bed. Mine. Tomorrow you will be gone again and I'll shrivel up the way I did before, but you are here now and there isn't any other place I want you to be.

So here is the end of my own little ode to you. But listen carefully, otherwise you'll miss the best part. Ready? Here it is: *I still love you.*