



# To Write Happy

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I learned to smile again when I got older, something I already knew as a child. I ran away from my teachers laughing, laughter I tried to smother while hiding under a table. It didn't matter how often my father spanked me or my teacher sent me to the principal's office; I would do it again with an open grin that nobody could take away from me. I miss that smile.

So, when my professor tells me to write about something happy, my mind turns to fiction. Where the hero saves the day and gets the girl, wide shots as the sun sets, and a grateful city in the background (but just enough side characters die, so I'm not accused of being unrealistic). Maybe I could write an extended metaphor for happiness: a boat tossed amongst the waves until it finally finds port in the storm. A vague poem that's about some joy I don't know the meaning of, but someone else might. What if I wrote about the last time I felt happy? Would someone read it and smile? But the page stays empty every time, even when words are on it.

Instead, I write about punching the wall of my shower. I write about crying out to God while on my knees, tears streaming down my face, or the countless hours I've sat alone in my room thinking about nothing and everything. The nights when I can't sleep because I only dream of her, writing poems at 3 a.m. that no one will ever read, prose about having friends yet knowing no one. I know this isn't how it is supposed to be.

## M c D a v i d

I sometimes get jealous of the person who wrote poems last year, especially those I wrote in my year-and-a-half relationship. They were filled with joy and wonderment, ecstatic that someone chose me and nobody else. Those poems talked of flowers, roots, the sunrise, and the wind that blew softly against my back.

Now, I write of nothing but broken dreams and red knuckles, and the wind gives no comfort. Since being alone, I've created better, more sophisticated works, poems, and prose I'm proud of. But they aren't the same. They don't make me smile. I claim I'm writing for others so they can feel deeply and know they're not alone. But if I stop lying to myself for just one second, I'm writing to myself because I have nowhere else to go. I miss writing to her.

*La La Land* is both my favorite and least favorite movie. I ecstatically watch two people hell-bent on not being together fall in love anyway, and my heart breaks every time they fall out of it. I love love, especially earned love. I don't believe in love at first sight. You may feel an initial attraction that is almost overpowering, but that's not love. Love is when you learn someone's whole person, what makes them unbearable but so easy to care about. Where you want to witness their entire life, be there every step of the way, and fight for and alongside them.

That connection isn't instantaneous; you earn it through hard work, faith, and loyalty beyond doubt. When you find that kind of love, letting it slip away can corrode the soul. It becomes a stench that plagues the mind, leaving its mark. So, when I rewatch *La La Land*, I am tempted to pause the movie prematurely to let Mia and Seb have their happily ever after. But that's not the truth. I finish the film.

When I try to "write something happy" now, I don't know what to say. I sit outside with stagnant hands, the sun on my back, and a pleasant wind rolling through. I try to think of things that make me truly happy, but all I can do is sit there.

The last time I felt truly happy was when we watched movies under the blanket one night. Her legs were draped over mine. She stared at me until I gave in and massaged her feet (I hate feet). I had a smile on my face until she finally noticed and asked why, to which I had no answer. Softly running my hands through her hair, untangling the knots and blissfully unaware of the movie we were watching. Closing my eyes to kiss her, feeling her hands in mine and the scent of her hair reaching my nose. We had to rewind it when she realized I hadn't seen any of the movie in the last twenty minutes. I even enjoyed going to work, knowing that I would have the money to spend on a gift or a date, to allow myself to make her smile.

M c D a v i d

I don't "write happy" anymore. There's nothing to write about. I refuse to write about things I do to numb myself, because people shouldn't learn how to lose themselves from me. I only write sad stories now; maybe it will help someone else the way it helped me.

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*Header photo by Hallie Von Hagen McDavid*

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