

THIS
ACCIDENT
OF BEING
LOST

SONGS AND STORIES

LEANNE
BETASAMOSAKE SIMPSON



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To Adikwag,
wish you were here.

SELFIE

I'm going through your instagram feed, making a list of all your likes this month. Then I'm splitting them into four categories: bands you saw, books you read, pets & babies, and special places you went. Then I'm going to go through all the photos you posted this month and split them into the same categories. Then I'm going to go through my feed and categorize all the likes I got from you this month and use this to increase my likes from you next month. I know you love my dead animal photos because even though you're vegan or an animal rights activist or something like that you get NDNs on a fairly deep level or you don't mind dead animals or maybe you just imagine my dead animals are sleeping in NDN heaven. I know you never like my protest photos, photos of my kids doing awesome things, or my farmer's field series. I might shelve that series. I thought it was arty and you'd get it, but you're not getting it. It's not producing likes from you so I'm going to leave it this month, I think. I'm going to save these four charts in excel until the first day of next month and I'll add in my new stats. I haven't had to add a category to your chart in four months now so I'm pretty sure that your liking and posting stats have stabilized. You get the most likes from your friends for band and pet photos, and the least likes for books. Honestly you don't post very many baby pics. You don't have kids and near as I can tell you're not a baby person. But every once in a while you do post one, I think out of obligation because we just turned forty and it's everyone's last chance to procreate so we have to act excited and supportive. It's the kind thing to do.

After I'm done instagram, I'm going to go through our texts and figure out who instigated each individual texting conversation and who was the last one to reply. I personally hate being the last one to reply in a texting conversation. It's like the other person just disappears or tells you to go fuck yourself, so I try specifically now to

leave most texting conversations first as a matter of principle. Except for the inner circle. Everyone who now holds membership in my inner circle always signs off a texting conversation with XO or xx or xoxo or xox or the deadly x. To get into the inner circle, in fact, you can't be a texting abandoner. That's a fucking rule.

You are no longer in my texting inner circle precisely because of these statistics. For instance, last month you instigated six texting conversations and I instigated five, but you text-abandoned me nine out of the eleven conversations. This month is different. I'm aiming for four to five abandonments at the most because I know I can quit better than you. If anything, I am the quitter in this relationship. It means that our conversations are a lot shorter and shallower but I'm not getting caught with my pants down, so to speak. Maybe I should add text-length to the chart?

Next I'm doing your fb stats. These are a lot harder to calculate, or a lot more time-consuming anyway. I stay online for the entire time you are up on Mondays so I can clock and average how much time you're on fb based on your iphone. On average, you spend four minutes per half hour of waking time on fb. You could have used those four minutes to check in on me, via text, but you didn't, so that's reason number two why you are no longer in my inner circle.

You keep quitting and then rejoining twitter, so twitter use is hard to clock. Plus I think you mostly just read people's feeds; you never participate, which isn't giving back what you are taking. Reason number three why you are no longer in my inner circle: problems with reciprocity.

If you texted me right now, I'd tell you that I'm having a dinner party. I'm having these "folks" over that use the word "folks" regularly in conversation. They are visiting his parents here on the rez and they're from the west coast so they're food snobs. Which is probably my issue. I always feel like a cheap trashy NDN when I'm on the west coast what with all the goddamn trees, mountains, ocean, and salmon, and all the goddamn white people tripping over

themselves to stop pipelines. WTF. Anyway, I'm not actually that good at dinner parties. I'm good at inviting people over, drinking too much, and then collaboratively making kraft dinner well after midnight. See? That would have been a funny and uplifting texting conversation. Your loss.

I'm going to do three hundred sit-ups today because I really want a ripped abdomen and time is running out. You can't get a ripped abdomen after forty, well probably you can, but your skin is so loose you still look gross so why bother?

After I do three hundred sit-ups I'm going to the beach. I hope you text me when I am at the beach and ask me what I'm doing because I've already planned on sending you a selfie of me with my nearly ripped abdomen in a bikini. I took it last week (ok, I didn't take it. I got this dad at the beach to take it because I simply cannot take a good selfie of me on the beach), then I filtered it and photoshopped it and now it's all ready to go.

Remember that game we played when we first started texting? You would ask me, "What are you doing?" and I would have to text back immediately with whatever it was I was doing. Same went for you. Fuck. It was a great exercise really, because I got out there and did some really cool stuff in case you texted, at least at the beginning. And then I realized that if I just made a list of all the cool things I could be doing, it was more fun than actually doing all the really cool stuff. Because it felt like kind of a burn when I did something cool that I definitely wanted you to know about but then you didn't text me so you didn't get to hear about it.

I'm going on vacation next week and I have NOT decided how to handle that at all! How do I want to play it?? Do I want to pretend that I'm off the grid? Having such an incredible, fantastic, over-the-top, real-life experience that I can't possibly be dragged back down into the shallow waters of social media? Do I want people to wonder where I am? Wonder if I've logged off completely? Do I want them to miss me, and feel sad/bad about themselves? Or should I

post the most outstanding four to five photos per day, maybe off my instagram feed, just amplifying the shit out of any glimmer of fun I do have? Then they'll feel bad/sad about their own lives or lack of fun and adventure, and they'll put me on a pedestal of how to really live your life to the fullest. And you. How the fuck am I going to play it with you? Remember when you went to Boston and you **almost** forgot to tell me and I would have been all, *wtf you hate me, no texts in seven days*, but it was just because you were in the States and were avoiding those deadly roaming charges but not tech-savvy enough to buy a new sim card? I sort of want you to feel like that. Like maybe I should forget to tell you I'm going and just see what happens when there are no texts from me for seven days and probably I could even go longer than seven days because for the first seven days I am going to be having some approximation of real fun in the real world so if I could go for say five more days, that would be approaching two weeks. Burn for you. The only risk is if you don't notice, which is a fairly big risk.

There is a third space. Say nothing. Post a few stellar vacation photos to fb when I know you're on your phone, and then text you the selfie with a quick "so sorry. that wasn't meant for you. soon. xo"

PRETENDING FEARLESS

There is a part inside, between anatomy and physiology, that you drop breath into when you sing. If you imagine filling a balloon with air and sitting it on top of your pubic bone, the place I mean is just behind that. It controls breath but for more important reasons than the science of oxygen.

This was the part of me that was surprised when you showed up out of nowhere, wearing the same clothes as when I last saw you. This was the part of me that sped up when you got into the car like you were supposed to be there, as if it was no big deal. I wasn't even waiting. Or wondering.

It was you, and it wasn't you. It was the directive form of you, without tricky smiles and sideways glances, and that part of you that makes you fall in love with everything. It was a coded you, an algorithmic you. Now that I look back, I wonder why I wasn't suspicious, because you were all narrative.

You told me to take you to the most beautiful place in my territory.

I knew it was a test.

I knew I would pass in a way that would make you consider taking things too far. I find that interesting. I find riding the edge of taking it too far pregnant grace. People who are just learning how to walk are not afraid of taking things too far.

We know what your people think about us. We know you feel pity because the largest city in the country is on top of us, thrusting in and out like it's our benevolent Wiindigo, fucking us in time to our screams like it's death metal. Like our loss is tragic and we are small people. Like golf courses and dreamcatchers and selling out are all we have left.

You'd fight harder to keep what you have if you knew. We all would.

You and me are quiet in the car because this is what sits between us. You've come all this way so soon. You are already not satisfied with me coming into you, you want to also be in me. This is rare.

It takes forty-five minutes to get there. It's hard wall raining, making us all look depressed before noon, making my fingers and toes ache cold even though it's twenty degrees above zero. The car is singing anthems for sent runners and lost feelings. We transition from lowlands to shield. I want to impress you with this part of my land, like the Canadian Shield makes me more NDN than just deciduous trees, and then I know the pity that's draping the car isn't yours, it's mine.

I pull the car over on the muddy country road with tentative shoulders. I get out and you follow. We walk up the hill on the road whose damage time has made too deep for travelling. We take the path down to the spot where the river's body secretly drops and takes a sharp turn to the west, throwing the water into a kind of chaos you can hear and see and taste.

I'm careful not to overlay emotion onto this reality. The water isn't angry even though its strong is carving rock. It isn't even confused because of the crucial interruption in its flow. Its sound is just a rupture so other voices can be heard.

I climb over the fence and walk down the rocky bank, taking a big step out onto a ledge overhanging the canyon. The water is high, and the rocks are slippery. I pretend fearless.

I sit.

Beside.

Your lips on my forehead.

Your arms.

There is a part inside between anatomy and physiology that you drop breath into when you sing. If you imagine filling a balloon

with air and sitting it on top of your pubic bone, the place I mean is just behind that. It controls breath but for more important reasons than the science of oxygen.

This is the part of me that dissolved.

You are no longer directive. Your freckles are back and your mischievous eyes are trying to catch mine and I can see your light again. I wonder who brought you here and why you came and what sorts of expectations you've brought in your backpack.

You sit up and so do I. I turn towards the falls and the wounded canyon and pull my knees towards my chest so I can rest my head on them.

I wonder what you'll try and take.

I wonder how I'll have to pay.

I drop tobacco into the water unceremoniously, like the old days.

You hand me a stick of red licorice, and we both smile.

AIRPLANE MODE

omg. chi'miigwech for last night. you are so sweet & so fun. #crush.

i don't know what this thing between you & me is supposed to be.
#love #whatarewe?! #lol

we have to play it cool. you can't be liking everything i post. be careful of that. #weweni #playitcool

you can't be never liking my posts either. for one thing that sends me into an #existentialcrisis & too few likes could mean you're mad or you've lost interest or you've moved on or you're purposely trying not to like my posts. L

GREAT IDEA: log on to smartberrytrackertm to keep track. it automatically gives you your totals for each ¼ hour and then averages over days & weeks. #STAY WITHIN THE TARGETS. it's the only way to meet our #relationshipgoals

i want you to know that i am always here for you and that we can talk about whatever you want. #alwayshere #4ever

i love you. #gizaagiin #anishinaabemowin J

i want you to know that when i said i was always here, i meant it. smartberrytm chat me if you're anxious kwe. i am well aware that we are all supposed to get 3 hours of non-screen time a week and i'm committed to that and #forestyoga because i #lovelife and smartberrytm powers down for 4 minutes every hour through the night so I'm covered. #imhere #covered #goodlife

so it's been 45 minutes and i haven't heard from you and i know you are meeting with del for americanos so i'm just going to assume that you guys are good. #besties #caffeine

whatcha up to kwe? #miss #love

i can see you're on smartberrym chat by that red dot by your name and i can see del's on smartberrym chat because they also have that big stupid red dot by their name and you can both see that i'm on smartberrym chat because i must also have that big stupid red dot by my name but nobody is smartberrym chatting with me so i can only assume you are smartberrym chatting with them which seems exactly the same as you having the same kind of sex i imagine having with you with them in front of me. #ugh #jealous L L L

i just posted a photo of me harvesting birch bark at this time last year and after 3 minutes I already have 50 smartberrym likes and i totally feel better even though you still haven't texted. #nativer-thanyou #hollaatmekwe

you were on smartberrym chat one minute ago and i posted that 3 minutes ago so you've seen it, and you didn't give me a like. L #relationshipgoals

kwe. what's up? did you see that? i just posted the smartberrym video of sisters so people don't think im just self promoting. #ATCR #wow #throwback #retro

i KNOW. it's 3:32 minutes long! i only watched the first 30 sec. #wtf #oldstuffissolong

glad it went good with del. i'm good. i'm just deciding which photo from the powwow to post for #throwbacktuesday #hoop or #jingle?

#notjustselfpromoting #community

totes. #hoop it is.

have you eaten?

i'm fine. i'm smartberrytm polychatting with makwa, migizi & wag-
osh. they are totally coming tonight to my book launch. #excited.

kwe i don't know what to wear. #help! #fashion911 #profesh

yep i posted it. got lots of suggestions. working on it. #wardrobe
#booklaunch #Airplanemode

if i don't get like 450 likes in the first minute of launching i'm going
to fucking die. i WILL NOT be able to take it. #Airplanemode
#tobaccodownprayersup

where are you? you HAVE to be there. #booklaunch #Airplanemode

fuk. i hope i bought enough #initiallikestm and #initialsharestm
#Airplanemode

5 mins out #Airplanemodelaunch

people better like this book. #fingerscrossed #nervous
#Airplanemode

omfg. you're NOT ON smartberrytm? WTF. starting in 4 minutes.
#nightmare

it's fine. it's totally fine. i'm sorry too. #stressedout #fml

#remembertobreathe #centre #debwe

ONE MINUTE!!!! #AirplanemodeLaunch #Airplanemode

kwe, this is it. Airplane Mode THE BOOK is launching. so. fuck-
ing. pumped. #sopumped #Airplanemode #ndnlit #canlit #canpoli

launching...

Airplane Mode

I'd like to apologize to you specifically for giving you that half-assed hug the other day when I ran into you at the airport. I was uncomfortable and irritated because smartberrytm was almost out of battery even though I put it in airplane mode for most of the day and I was trying not to lose it after showing my boarding pass, and I was also trying to get my belt back on and not be accused of smuggling creatorswatertm through the security checkpoint, and then — surprise — there you were. If I'd had time to sort of, you know, smartberrytm chat you first and think this entire interaction through and be the person I want to be instead of the person I am, I would have looked you in the eye, walked into your breath, and felt the heat of your body against mine. I would have brought my arms up to your chest and then just paused so our faces could find each other, so our skin could just get used to things. You would have kissed my forehead because I'm always smartberrytm chatting about that. We would both look down, but you're taller, so you'd look down onto me. My arms would surround you and mostly we would both be glad. The End.

aww miigs. kwe. i know. i love that part too. no, no, i totally meant that. #muse #love #connection

so #awesome. #wheh. #Airplanemode

#635 likes in the first min! #bestseller #art #ndnlit #worthit

love. Xo