

# Fanmail to Ellen Page

by Lou Wightman

You and I will never meet. You will never even know I existed. Even in dreams you will never imagine me. Someone told me once that your sleeping mind cannot conjure up new faces. It just spits out all the ones you've ever seen and that's it. That's it.

You walk, almost floating, on the glittering water of a foreign sea, white light washing over you even at night. And I am in the core of the earth, skin melted, working, using heat-resistant tools in deep darkness with no end in sight. Just centuries of big clumsy movements. In my bones there is an ache, this dull throbbing that sneaks up on me sometimes. It is the suspicion of you poured deep inside of me. (you floating gently through marrow red and yellow)

But there is nothing of me inside of you. Your bones do not grow toward me inside of your jeans. Nor does your hair curl, spiralling in on itself as a reaction to my absence. But I can take a day, all of my days really, and I can fold it. Make it tiny and wrap it with a sturdy cord, address it to you in loopy cursive. I can send it to you, hand it over, let you have it easily since I don't want it anyway. I can write you a love letter from my minuscule bubble in the outer core and send it floating through the iron tide until it reaches that mailbox that hovers at the edge of the mantle and it will take whole lifetimes to reach you but all the time will gather to make it really fucking mean something.

It starts quickly. You do not ever wake up slowly. Some days you sit up straight in the bed and stare ahead waiting to find out if it's still you sitting there with the same life you've always known. And everyday it is, so you just quickly get showered while avoiding the mirror, which at this point requires no active thinking. Remember that so much of what you do is like this.

This day is summer. But it is not lazy or beautiful or easy. You slip into thin clothes and when you leave you don't know where to put

your hands. It is the feeling you get after a winter filled with deep pockets.

You live in a not-very-nice neighborhood so when you walk you stare straight down at the sidewalk and in every stride is a barely-perceptible lament for this being the only place in the world you are ever noticed. Descending the stairs of the subway goes against all of your human instincts. You will always struggle to pull your body down that first flight with the heat creeping up your body and the milling of humans all around. You'd sit down if you could but there is nowhere to sit, this place is full of people waiting millennia for a train to pull in and take them away from this terrible place, to glide in and save them in one gentle silver swoop. Or maybe that's just you. Maybe everyone else is just going to work.

They all stare straight ahead while you pace back and forth because you have yet to learn patience. The sweat drips down at a disgusting rate and you look around for signs of other sweaty people but you're the only slimy one in sight so you just keep up the feverish pacing with your eyes down while your thighs rub together, the friction sending vibrations down the tunnel, maybe to Manhattan even.

And like some kind of magic, it rolls up and the sound of the brakes echoes deep down in the earth and squeals through your bones as you jump up to get into the air conditioning. When it's working, it really works and freezes the droplets you are covered in. You sit down next to two small girls. They don't want you there and make it known by throwing a pack of chiclets at your head. You scoot on the bench seat trying to get away from them and they resume their pole dancing in the middle of the car. They are shaking their four-year-old asses and you are the only fascinated one because the people here have seen everything there is to see, ever. Or probably they are just politely vacating their mind of thoughts while sharing this common space but accidentally they become powerful vacuums sucking things up left and right. You have to move your elbow slightly to get out of the 65-year-old woman next to you's suction range.

The two mini-strippers are back. The smaller one sets her Capri Sun down on the seat, straw pointed toward you and with a shiny bounce, sits on it. Translucent reddish juice slides slowly down the bench while the baby ass-shaker's smile grows wider and wider. Those big brown eyes mesmerize you so it is not until the red liquid has been absorbed by your skirt that you move forward in your seat, making a dissatisfied noise you sorta hope someone will hear. The buzzing of the vacuums is too loud though.

Your train ride is very long. The tiny gyrating monsters are gone in two stops but the juice and pouch serve as a clue to their presence to the two professionally dressed men who hurry to the bench and stop just in time. They both straighten, grab onto the same pole and stare for full seconds (and seconds are hours to well-dressed businessmen) wordlessly looking at the series of puddles and then you sitting there at the end of them. You desperately hope they do not think that was your Capri Sun and try your hardest to arrange your features in a commiserative face to say that you are also annoyed at this spilled juice nuisance. But your face never obeys you and instead arranges itself to say, "I did it! It was me, you fuckers and I won because now you have to stand!"

So you look down and when you look up again they are vacuums instead of people. All that staring blankly ahead can really do a person in. For fear of hypoxia you exit the train a stop early.

You haven't really come here to do anything except get out of your apartment with the walls that are moving closer and closer, but only fractions of millimeters because anything else would be dangerously obvious. And also there's the roommate who is a little too much work, always wanting things from you like conversations and shared experiences.

You go to parks, you go to bookstores, you drink espresso drinks. You do these things all while watching people hungrily, the condensation from your vanilla latte dripping down your hands and dress and legs, sipping automatically, feigning indifference which is hard with eyes so voracious. You drink people in. You swish them around your mouth, using your tongue in almost violent ways and

once you swallow you open your mouth slightly, panting for air after these dripping seconds. Since you were a little girl you thought if you watched enough pretty girls you would somehow be them or have them. You don't know yet that the being and having are intrinsically linked somewhere in your brain.

If it is a weekday you most likely head home before dark because in sunlight the four blocks from the subway go fast, but in the dark they require the work of deep rivers needing fording. Once home you will eat a little and lay around a lot. If it is a weekend then you will go somewhere, like a bar where music is being played by your friend's cousin's boyfriend's band. As a rule, most of what you do is removed at least twice.

The current bar is pathetic. It is hot and grimy and filled with people that are just echoes of other people. This neighborhood is renowned for people that are not people, just reverberations of what a person should be. You will walk a block and and see the same exact people that you passed a block back. The resemblance will be uncanny and you'll look around the first seven times this happens. But after awhile you will just start looking around for people that look like you. You can't listen to what your friend is even yammering about because you're so paranoid you're about to find out you're just an imprint too.

But you made it to this bar in the clear. Your friend has other friends and these are people that know how to talk and say interesting and witty things and don't know you. Naturally, your friend talks to these people and you just stand there and stare straight ahead, but no matter how hard you try you can't turn into a vacuum.

The band is starting and the people are all around, clutching beers tightly, yelling ironic things in their partners' ears, all their disdain and condescension at the ready. But you open up, just a tiny little crack of an opening and can't tear your eyes from the stage. There's this giant creature-like thing hanging above the band. It's the only thing in the whole place that would suggest it's not a total shithole. Made of the same nylon as basketball nets, it hangs down

skimming the forehead of the lead singer like so many sea anemone tentacles.

Three songs go by and you're still staring at it. It sways like a sea anemone too. The changing colored lights bounce off it gently. It's disappointing when you finally see one of the three guitarists. He's playing chords while moving his arms and body the least possible amount he can. Without really wanting to you picture him masturbating using the same weak arm movement, his hand just sort of holding his dick.

But the lead singer, the lead singer is something else altogether. He is singing now and it's not that he's good at it, it's that you can just feel him feeling. He's exactly right for a front man, he's got this haunted look with these hollowed out eyes that suddenly make you realize that you are front and center; the crowd has pulled back for some reason.

For two songs you debate whether or not he's looking right at you. Then you realize you're the only person not moving to the music. People are tapping their feet, swaying their bodies, bobbing their heads like they find this music moving, stirring in some way. But it is a trick, they are most definitely not feeling a single thing and when they dance it is half hearted, self conscious and they never lose their grip on their cheap beers. Skinny girls with nice hair and tight little asses are moving precisely with the rhythm, touching each other briefly to feel real for seconds in between breathing. You, you're just standing stock still letting your breaths overtake you.

The band is done, they are leaving. People go out to smoke cigarettes and laugh in small groups. You stay even though you haven't talked to anyone in ages. You watch the breaking down of the stage, the breaking down of the boys as they become flesh and bones with musical accessories. Your friend's friends smoke and so she has to come and talk to you because she doesn't. She buys you a beer.

The next band is a girl band full of long-legged, fashionable, shiny-haired females. You make fun of them before they even start playing because you are wary and also jealous. But mostly you want

to make her laugh. You want to whisper in her ear and feel her hair on your face and see that smile. You want her to whisper back. The music is loud so her nose touches your face. The band is terrible. There is a lot of wailing, a lot of discordant strumming punctuated by flicks of long hair. You laugh loudly though because you really appreciate all the quips that are whispered so close to your flesh it grows hot with her breath

More beer so you can feel like everyone else, and when you're drunk it's over. You've become the shadow like everyone else in the room and how it feels is relieving. You walk to the train alone feeling hot and cold and sit with the million other people at this trendy station. You sit next to someone terribly beautiful. Beautiful because of the turn of the lips, the delicate way ear meets jaw, the softness of the hair which can be seen from miles away. Terrible because they just stare long tall glasses full of looks before blinking and the nanosecond their eyes are closed makes you feel muddled sitting so close to them.

Beer sloshing through your guts you find you can finally turn to vacuum and then you hiccup and you are you and you stand before your apartment door. You take deep breaths before opening the door, trying to steady yourself, trying to sink somewhere inside yourself. But she isn't home so it doesn't matter and you can collapse on the bed without having to think.

And here is what you have been waiting for all the long day. Here with the lights turned off, in the cotton folds of sheets, four pillows framing your supine body, they come to you. It is whoever you want to be there with you at this moment and in these hours before sleep you live the life you want and are loved by them in infinite amounts. It goes like this. You see a movie or read a book, sometimes even meet eyes with a stranger on the train, but mostly it is celebrities.

There is something special there inside of these bodies that haunts you long after you finish the book or see the movie. You go through the day and you hold them inside of you like a ghost that shares your skeleton. Your movements become graceful as you share your mind and you breathe deeper to fill their lungs with air. You thirst for

moments alone with them, the nights where you imagine every thing you can never be or have in glorious detail so you can't ever forget.

Tonight you don't just imagine being her girlfriend, you imagine every part of it. You imagine the first time you meet. You are always something spectacular and in your head you will be slightly more famous than she, but you will love her from mere glance. The first night you meet her things will align and blind magnetism will find you two alone, somewhere dim and soft. Laying in your bed in your shitty apartment you mouth the words you will say and the words she responds with. Things will get very serious and you will take her hands and press them to your chest so she can feel the heart beating as rapid as machine gun fire underneath your skin. Here you will lay on your back and stare through the darkness, imagining her brown eyes drawing close and you will touch your own chest and your heart, and it will be beating hard.

(Do you see now? That this is what you do to me? You tie me up in knots and make me crazy. But it's not your hand on my chest. It is mine.)

But we are not done with this day, Ellen. After falling asleep things get blurry. At some point during the night, though, you usually leave me. It happens so often. This is why sometimes I go to Times Square during very very busy times when no one who is not a tourist clutching a camera should be there. It is to touch a person. To feel a heart beating that is not yours through the skin of a stranger is wonderful and terrifying. All the things I do everyday, the way I walk, the places I go, the music I listen to, it is with this awful assumption that I am the end of the universe. I cannot really wrap my head around not being the only human being out there, the breathing beating pounding pulsing realness of a body. It is like certain religions. You know with all your tiny heart that there is a heaven but you cannot understand forever no matter how hard you try.

On the 4 train a little boy's head brushes your arm, not once or twice but four glorious times the roughness of tight little curls sweeps your skin and you forget to breathe as you stare ahead and

try not to tremble. The half of time that I do not spend loving you feverishly, I spend it trying to be normal. In public places I listen closely to conversations between friends. I memorize words and phrases and write them down. I compile a whole notebook full of notes on how to be interesting, but still when the time comes I am far too distracted by the notion of someone being interested in me to actually string together the sentences that would make it real. And that's where you come in. Effortlessly, invisibly, you glide into my life, picking up all the things I drop and kissing me, kissing me, just kissing me in front of people, in front of great big crowds, in front of the whole city, in front of the whole world and everyone is cheering for us, for our love. In fact, every thing that every other person does is just an echo of this kiss, of our love for each other. All the things that happen that you suspect don't mean a thing, they actually add up. The sum is mounting and mounting, one day we are dead and still, still the number is rising, approaching infinity very very swiftly and we are not dead we are not dead we are not gone because infinity means you do not go away.

But there are some nights when the idea of you fails me. There are most definitely times when I realize that there is a real you somewhere that is neither as perfect as I imagine nor could ever love me and the sinking dread-filled anxiety this gives me makes it impossible to even imagine, even while swathed in sheets in the dark of my own private room, that you are mine. These nights are not often or I would be dead. You must know by now the great risk of living approximately half your life in your own strange imagination.

Knowing that it isn't real is a feeling that makes your bones shake and ache inside your skin. In the bed you are laying on your back and crying hard. Your sobs are silent except for the occasional gasp of air and when you hear one you maybe want to do drastic things to your body. There is rubbing; there is always rubbing when it's bad. Your skin just needs friction, it is calling out, it is yelling and screaming, seeing its only opportunity for sensation. Your wonderful



self control means that emotions don't ever make it up there to the epidermis, so your skin really fucking wants this

But the fact of it is pooling in the hollows adjacent to your collarbone, that she is gone, completely gone and you are so alone. So alone that there is not one chance, or even a small sliver of a chance of a chance that you will ever not be alone and the bare boned agony of it seeps from the inside out and there is more than enough to fill all those pores, each and every pin point with feeling.

After I cry, after my bones are racked with many sobs both wet and dry, you come. You climb on top of me because I don't want to breathe anymore. Your body fits perfectly on top of mine. And even though you are very small you press and press and press and together we sink down through earth's layers. My eyes close before we reach the core because tears make eyes very tired and the weight of you feels so perfect.

I wake down here, under it all, with no sign of morning. You are gone in a different way now and my eyes are swollen. The absence of you will always make me feel hollowed out, but I can crawl into this concavity and live there and maybe we can be penpals.

