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Sestina for My Chef and Sixteen-Year-Old Version of Myself

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When we naively planned our lives together it was a mutual decision: we were going to be poor. And it was going to be wonderful. Poor and happy. We were never to be alone, we were to be the pair, so young and in love, sleeping in the back of vans, traveling until the end of time. We would go out to dinner and sneak too many mints. And kiss and kiss and kiss. Then breathe deep and soak in the scent. I would giggle, you would kiss my nose. Photographs I can’t, won’t dispose of. One of us as little Eskimos, me with my rosy cheeks, nose to nose. Mid-laughter. I would tear you apart and put you back together, down to every pore of your golden brown skin. Whenever anyone speaks of love, it makes me think on all of the letters I’ve written but never sent to you. With your fancy, new knives you taught me how to pare Chicken breast, not that we ate it. You showed me how to mince Garlic correctly and how to identify thyme. Always picking fights over little nothings that I could have sworn meant something at the time, They seldom did. You don’t, but everyone else knows. How much I regret, how much I’ve changed. Sneaking mints Is lonelier a task than it should be now. Something so mundane should hold no significance. Pour Me another drink and I will tell you all about it. I will ramble about how to tell the ripeness of a pear And the corresponding numerical code from the grocery store I worked at to impress him, wanting to make him proud, the perfect cashier, counting every cent. All letters I’ve written but never sent To you, all of my confessions. Do you remember that time When we were fourteen and it was so cold I couldn’t breathe. We were only in tee shirts and you held me so tight, protecting me from the cold like you protected me from everything. I hid my face from the wind in your chest, looked down and saw
the snow and your pair
Of black converse. They, among other things about you, made me crinkle
my nose.
Did you know I don’t do that anymore? Every word I write screams, “Poor
me, poor me” when it was all my doing. I’ll have you know it was all my
doing. With my fancy culinary skills I knowingly take my heart and cut,
slice, mince.
Remember when you used to cut? Cut, cut, slice, mince.
She told me the scars bring her pain, and I quake. There are no words.
Forever I am holding onto all those letters I’ve never sent,
What are you waiting for? Pour
Me another drink and I’ll tell you about the time
We saw a shooting star, cuddled close. An intimacy no one knows.
The perfect pair.
You have always had the deepest pair
Of soft, sincere brown eyes of anyone I will ever meet. I swear I saw your
soul smiling back at me through them all the time.
I wonder if she notices, I wonder if she knows.
I wonder if you’re accustomed to her scent.
Memories. Yours will be with me forever, mine will fade in time.
Remember? We were going to be poor.
Poor girl, that poor, poor
Girl. See how she digs her own grave? She and her pen, they make the
perfect pair.
I miss you all the time,
All the time, I still sneak mints.
I’m sorry. You’re still in my heart, I always wonder, I hope she’s better. All
the letters I’ve never sent.
Everyone knows.

— Alicia Banaszewski