

You are who I love

Hanna du Plessis, inspired and adapted from Aracelis Girmay's original

You, who I pushed into the winter fish pond, and you, after we were coming clean from tossing mud cakes at motorists, peed on my head as revenge.

You with animal best friends spending a sleepless night cuddling orphaned monkeys in diapers, you making animal sanctuaries where you go, planting a tree for every patient that dies, you are who I love.

You who couldn't wait to leave the house, who dives head first and wholeheartedly into adventures, some of your choosing, some a brokenness, and still you give yourself with abandon.

You who taught me in the shadow of your absence the importance of giving yourself to what matters, you who held my hand as we ran into the icy sea, you who with the sharpest brain and a ham-handed heart always providing, you are who I love.

You, scaring kids with frogs in your five year-old hands, warming a piglet, washed with Elizabeth Anne's in your robe, hatching a chick in your cleavage, always looking over us in care and prayer.

You, my best friend, you who found me on the outskirts of the cool groups, took my hand and became a reason to show up in schools not meant for soft oddlings like me, you are who I love.

You who picked me up in a beat up Annie with Bob Dylan blaring, or in your ancient BMW with the floor so rusted I could lose my lunch bag, you with your combover who picked me up when the car was out of gas or when we hitchhiked and didn't harm me, you are who I love.

You who reserved your guest bedroom behind the trampoline and jasmine bush for me to crash into when I needed the softness of a loving home, and your kids, garlands of love around me as we read *The BFG* together.

You who surprised me by welcoming me into your circle of friends and offered me a place of belonging where we built architectural models of the Hagia Sophia, disappeared on hikes and behind waterfalls, found God in fynbos and the scent of dust in rain, you are whom I love.

You who pruned the trees so that the dogs couldn't catch the birds, you who sat for hours on a bus to wash our dishes, you who had no work and stable housing, you who were unsafe in the township, you are who I regret not seeing more fully, you are who I wished I loved more.

You, you who were not able to see and cherish me, you who hooked me into loyalty with empty promises and took from me that which I did not consent to. You are who I don't want near me, and still, still you are who I love.

You who I turned away from, withholding my presence and affection, you who may have felt abandoned, I am so sorry I didn't know how to express the chasm I felt or distance I needed. Forgive me. You are the one I love.

You who wrote policies almost putting me on the streets. And you, you who offered me your couch in the matchbox in Michigan. You, who didn't know I could barely afford groceries, you giving me ten thousand dollars, making me buckle in public view.

You who saw me in a sea of students, you who encouraged me to follow my dream, opened doors inside my mind, and offered to co-sign my loan, you are who I love.

You who resurrected my body from decades of numbness, tying my naked body to a tree to worship. And you, kissing me in Logan Square balcony while the sky applauds in thunder. You taking my tear-stained face in your hands, saying, “Never apologize for your emotions, they are gorgeous.”

You who mirrored my longing for a self-healing world, you who became my partner in almost everything, you who brings out the best in me as we both dance on the edge of the unknown, expanding the weave of wholeness through faults and extraordinary gifts. You, you are the one I love.

You who stepped off Mr. Rogers' set and into my life to fill it with paper hats, pyrotechnics, riveting tales of that time, “There I was...” lush gardens and candlelit Christmas with kindred spirits. And, oh! The generosity! My God! Torn up rent checks and the oasis. The oasis, people!

You who recognized me as your own, exclaiming, “You, you, you!” You who became my chosen family, the brave space where I could rewrite my being and belief that relationships of mutual care are possible, “everyone can get what she needs.” you are the one I love.

You who were my hot neighbor. Who loved me patiently for years until I felt safe enough to let you close. And your arms and home and kids and family becoming a harbor I can moor in. You who nurture trees and my spirit. You who love me with such tenacity and tenderness as this illness tears our world apart.

You who loves Man City and explains soccer with patience. You who notice my needs, you who are becoming gorgeous.

And you who will be a Duracell battery for Halloween. You are the one I love.

You who turned toward me in my illness. You who stepped bravely into dying with me. You are the one I love.

You who brings me perfume named “Dead Sexy,” and meets me on zoom to strategize how pleasure is possible when you are paralyzed, you who put a pee pad under my bum helping my hand hold the vibrator and saying, “Never be ashamed of your pleasure,” you are who I love.

And you, who will walk with me, in spirit or flesh as I transition. You are the one I love and will keep on loving as long as I am conscious.

I love you.

I love you.

I love you.

“I don’t know how to say goodbye, so I’ll say I love you.”

Hanna, introducing this reading at her “living end of life celebration.”

*To follow Hanna’s writing and forthcoming books,
see okaythen.net/voices/hanna-du-plessis*