

love in the universe

— Christine Ernst 2018

we talk for two hours at starbucks precious time for Celia these days
she brings me a small lavender square a patch in a quilt someone is sewing for her mother
all the strong women are invited to write a note to Pam on the fabric in sharpie
we will wrap her in love if not in health Celia explains that the cancer spreads like moss
she says the visiting nurse told them last night to cherish every moment now
and that she responded indignant laughing *but we are gals of the future we have plans*
she navigates the conflicting narratives of her grandmother who prepares for the worst and her
mother who awaits the strength to heal
she reasons that both are necessary stories right now she says that both could be true it is
unclear so she cleaves to her mother's plan because
the story is energy and her mother must be raised lifted strengthened by the future
even if there is no hope
we talk of the college she will attend in the fall how her fears of adulting and change are
diminished and right-sized by her mother's illness
she says *I will move away I will make friends I will have roommates I will do well and
these things do not worry me anymore*
with a jolt I remember she is 17 I am 51 exactly three times her age and I listen closely
young prophet she says that this is at once the best year of her life and the very worst and
that she knows that no matter the outcome she will be okay her connection to her mother
transcends time and form she knows that this is simply their current journey together
they will meet again and again through lifetimes
and she recites the prayer her mother raised her on

Love above me Love below me Love before me Love behind me
Love beside me Love around me Love inside me Love unto me
Love in the world Love in the universe

the two hours feel like 10 minutes and we walk to our cars
I tell her carefully not wanting to burden her further that I am impressed in awe in fact
of her strength her optimism that she is a sunbeam a rainbow a gift to her mother
herself us all *you are a sparkling human, Celia* I say trying to encapsulate my feeling and
I mean not like glitter not shine she is vital vibrant she scintillates
a transcendent being she laughs she says *oh I have so much to sparkle for*

two weeks later at the hospital I sit with her and her mother the sign on the door says *no
clergy* exclamation point we admire the completed quilt each message sewn into the
colorful patchwork I imagine this on Celia's bed at school this fall Pam says *this is so
fucking depressing gimme some dirt girlfriend* I oblige we laugh over the old stories
she tells me she is not afraid and will not be in pain when she transitions from this life she
says she knows her next life will be near Celia I think *they are gals of the future they have
plans* I watch them both there is a rhythm in them an underlying thrum of loving purpose

even as they prepare for this particular end I watch them breathe and speak and smile
and laugh Celia moves carefully tenderly around her mother
Pam's eyes do not leave her daughter I think *you two form a multitude*
mother and child are luminous in the july evening's dying light I cannot take a photo in this
sacred space but I need to remember this this union this dance this sweet leavetaking
it is a lesson I will need in the future
I have overstayed but before I go Celia says I must learn the movements that go with the
prayer that her mother raised her on
she stands at the foot of her mother's bed her long limbs seem to glow in the dusk
Love above me Love below me Love before me Love behind me
Love beside me Love around me Love inside me Love unto me
Love in the world Love in the universe
amen