

it's okay if they don't

My roommate brought home Halloween decorations this week. The bell pepper already died, and I've been making pesto to preserve the abundant, browning basil. I'm worried the green tomatoes on the vine outside won't have time to ripen. Some things die quickly, others take their time. I've learned that friendships do both.

Lately I've been happiest alone, sipping iced coffee at the farmer's market, baking cupcakes on the weekends. The friends I love most are farthest away. We are mourning the end of a friendship together, in hushed FaceTimes and long text messages. We are taught to mourn romantic relationships, to seek comfort in other women when the men in our lives disappoint. I often wish I'd seen a Disney princess who lost a best friend.

Who, when the weather grew cold, she began to disagree with over the tiniest of things—who would wash the dishes, which man the Bachelorette should have chosen. Maybe they fought over the same boy, or one found a friend she deemed cooler. To teach little girls that not all pain can be forgiven with a package of Oreos and a bottle of wine, and some conflicts are deeper than mistakes. That we should not expect or demand perfection and constancy from the women in our lives.

She would lose her friend slowly, then all at once, and we would have to watch the painful conversation. She would wonder where she failed at the sacred institution of female friendship, then learn that things may not be as sacred as they seemed. The dying green tomatoes on the vine are a sign of the natural cycle of things as summer turns to fall, to winter. There will be new tomatoes next summer. Even those may not last.

I wish we could have watched her pick up the pieces of herself after the awful revelation of the ending. To see her learn to trust again without losing herself.

The first loss I mourned an entire summer, crying by the pool. I lost myself. The second caused immense guilt. The third gave me an anger I hadn't felt before, so much that I didn't recognize my bitter self around her.

This fourth brings a heavy, dull ache, an ending that felt inevitably sad. Like unripe tomatoes, yellow flowers that haven't yet given way to fruit, sacrificing themselves to the rhythms of the world.

Every month we bleed; every year our bodies age and as years go on, we women change. I didn't even like tomatoes 7 years ago, I didn't know how to make pesto. We examine the people around us to determine how they fit into our new identities. I learned things from the plants that I've killed, from the friends I've lost. They were invaluable in their inconstancy. Failure is a funny thing. I am mourning the end of a female friendship, like I have so many times before, reflecting on the ways we grew together, then apart. The weather's getting colder. Lately I've been spending time alone, repeating the cycle of learning to trust without losing, learning to accept without blame. Watching the tomatoes grow on the vine. Hoping they'll ripen but understanding it's okay if they don't. I've learned that friendships do both.