

Between Bars, Season 1, Episode 8
“A Blues for Summer”

Hello. Welcome to Between Bars, a poetry podcast where we not only share poems, but also the stories between the lines. I’m SheryLeigh, your host and resident poet.

Now that I’ve welcomed you to the podcast, I also want to welcome you to the month of September. I guess...

I know, that’s probably not the greeting you were expecting. But truthfully, I am tired of pumpkins already. I haven’t even had a pumpkin spice latte yet, but I’ve been doing a fair amount of shopping for the home, and pumpkins are everywhere. Pumpkins and leaves and all things rustic. And I’m not ready—which has inspired my selection for this episode.

It’s actually not a poem per se, but it has poetic tendencies if you will. It’s also my perpetual mood at this time of year. It’s called “A Blues for Summer” and you can find it in my first book, “Promises & Epiphanies.” It’s pretty lengthy, so get comfy.

A Blues for Summer

I awoke this morning missing you. Missing you the way one misses a departing lover whom they still have the pleasure of lying next to – replaying yesterdays and stalling tomorrows.

Our relationship is a simple one. Each day, your sunbeams kiss my face good morning and your warm temperatures drape themselves across my bare shoulders. In turn, I flirtatiously hike up the hemline on my dresses and let your evening breezes play in my hair. Our love is easy, complementary, comfortable.

Yet I can feel you pulling away. Your passion is less intense, the warmth slowly fading from your touch. Your moods are becoming less predictable, your usual sunny disposition spotted with occasional cold fronts. Some days you are altogether absent. You return a day or two later, beaming like nothing happened. I melt in the warmth of your embrace, pushing away the nagging feeling that you are destined to leave again.

Like anyone who recognizes the beginning of the end, I am considering the role I played. I should have criticized less. Hugged you tightly even when I felt ugly, hot, and sticky. Wiped my brow during our hard times without sigh or complaint.

I should have cherished you. Sat at rooftop bars sipping daiquiris and mojitos. Sprawled out in parks across faded old blankets underneath the weight of you. Strolled in silence during long walks by the water. I should have lingered in your presence.

Realizing that we now have more days behind us than ahead, I am making plans to do all the things I have been putting off for tomorrow. Making my way to the beach to lie lazily next to you. Finding occasions to wear cute dresses I purchased with you in mind. Taking late night drives to nowhere, wind whipping through my hair. Staring dreamily at starry night skies. Loving you “quickly, like the time is running out on us.”* Because it is.

You will leave soon. I have picked up your dropped hints that this was never meant as forever.

Our affair will end as flings do: without fanfare. To spare us the awkward goodbye, you will steal away in the quiet of night as I lay sleeping. I will wake to find your belongings gone, a few photographs and my memories serving as the only proof that you ever came at all.

I will not attempt to make you stay. Somehow I can sense that my love would be less intense, less sincere, if I had you with me always. What we have is characterized by longing, and the satisfaction of attainment, then the desperation to stretch out the moments, followed by an inevitable, painful goodbye. It is this, the cycle of our love, that makes us beautiful.

While you are away, I will continue with life and make other friends. I'll flirt with Fall and snuggle up to Winter, even have a fling with Spring. What else is a girl to do?

But you will always have my heart. When you return, I'll be right here where you left me, ready to begin again, with you.

That was "A Blues for Summer."

This piece actually originated as a blog post back in 2013. I wrote it then, and chose it now, because I have such a hard time saying goodbye to summer. Every year.

It's worse this year because of COVID. I had just gotten used to being around people again! Outdoor dining has always been my fav, as you may have picked up on in the piece. But it has literally been a lifesaver in this season. This summer I took a couple of trips after being grounded for over a year. This holiday weekend, I attended my first concert since February 2020, and it felt so good to sit outside in my lawn chair and wave my church hand as Tamia sang about a love that gets better every day. From the weather to the recreational options to the chill pace, summer is a vibe that I never want to let go of.

As you heard, this piece is an extended metaphor comparing the ending of summer to the ending of a relationship. It is a reluctant goodbye to a lover who is slowly, quietly pulling away. However, interestingly enough, at the time that I wrote this piece, I had never actually experienced an end quite like that. There have been times when I sensed an ending was near, but the endings did not involve a love stealing away.

I often find myself wondering what in the world I'm going to share on this podcast. Then a piece crosses my mind and I think, "okay, that will work." But usually, it's a piece that I haven't read in years. And to look back on the pieces now in preparation for this show, having the luxury of time and life experience, can be a little startling. My words have a habit of playing me. I remembered this piece as a flirty farewell, but reading it now, eight years after writing it and having lived the reality that inspired the metaphor, it's giving me more painful parting—and a pattern of them.

One thing I've noticed as a writer is that just about every person who reads or hears your work gets something different from it. Some people are focused on the main point, others zoom in on a subpoint. Some people can paraphrase an analogy, others can quote a line. Some people find a reflection of their hurt, others a beam of hope. What resonates with people is about them as much as it is about my words. Who they are, what they have experienced in the past, what they hope for in the future, what is going on in their life at that exact moment—all those things contribute to their interpretation and feelings about the writing.

And what resonates today may be different than the part you felt deeply yesterday. Because writing, poetry, is deeply personal. When it comes to this piece, eight years ago I was the writer, but today I am the reader. The ability to transition between the two roles in order to both express myself and learn from myself is a beautiful thing.

So, what will be your takeaway from this piece? Maybe it's to cherish and be grateful for the moments as they are happening. Or maybe it's to take full advantage of the season you're in by packing in all the fun and by loving—to borrow from the same John Legend line that I quoted in the piece—“quickly, like time is running out.” Perhaps the message is to learn to part ways without resentment or regret. Or maybe it's to be open to embracing the next season and all it has to offer, accepting that different can still be good. Maybe it's simply to acknowledge that you're tired of the cycle of goodbyes and should say hello to a place where it's always summer—Cali, anyone? Or could the point be to believe that love, whether through someone old or new, will circle back around for you in the future?

Who knows? I certainly don't. As you decide, I'll raise a glass and toast to summer on its way out.

This was Between Bars with Sheryleigh. Connect with me! You can follow me on Instagram and Facebook @sheryleighwrites, on Twitter at @sheryleigh, and online at sheryleigh.com. This episode's piece, “A Blues for Summer,” can be found in my book Promises & Epiphanies: Life Revelations Through Poetry and Prose,” which is available for purchase on Amazon or my website. I also accept feedback and show ideas at info@sheryleigh.com.

Finally, if you enjoyed this episode, share it with a friend, or hey, drop it in your group text to let your friends know y'all need one last outdoor outing before fall arrives. Also, don't forget to subscribe to Between Bars wherever you listen to podcasts and to rate us on Apple Podcasts. Thank you for listening!