

January 10, 2021

Dear Jandy Nelson,

Grief is something of an all-encompassing experience, the type of thing that might seem to tip the Earth upon its axis, that might send splintered pieces of one's own identity flying away, only to stab the people in your life.

*I'll Give You the Sun* was maybe not the first book to resonate with me, but I believe it is one of the only books that has so prominently shaped my perspective on life, or to have stayed preserved within my mind for so long. Looking back, I know why it impacted me so greatly, why - despite having not understood in the moment - I felt such a deep connection to the story of Jude and Noah.

At the time in which I was reading this story, I was questioning the stability of the relationships of the people in my life, and I was constantly on edge when it came to death. Having faced the possibility of my own mother dying merely a few months before reading your book, I was left in distress. The terror and dread that I had seemed to have been repressing boiled over as I experienced, with the twins, the devastation that accompanies losing the people you love. Despite the pain that they had inflicted upon one another, regardless of the tensions that had been building between each of the characters, the guilt stemming from the loss of Noah and Jude's mother was nearly tangible, and I was left to face the emotions that I had been avoiding - the inevitability of death, the apathy that accompanies shock, and my ever-growing fear of change. Everything within me wanted to fight the story that was being told, of a family being torn apart, of friendships fading away with time, and of losing not only the people within your life, but also yourself. It was, however, in this rebellion against my own emotions that I found

the strength I needed to understand my own validity. You showed me that there can be perseverance through pain, that there *is* a light at the end of the tunnel. The story does not end with more pain, nor does it end with withheld resentment. The story ended with the characters reclaiming their affections, their vehemence, and their identities. It is in this reclamation and validation of his feelings that Noah in particular was able to begin healing, something that I have come to understand a great deal.

Upon reading *I'll Give You the Sun*, I also found myself drawn to the representation of a queer character. Having previously struggled with my own identity in that regard, I felt a distinct connection to Noah's fear of his sexuality and emotions, and could not stop myself from identifying with his quietly internalized struggle. Greater yet, I found myself drawn to the fact that he was not written as a gay character, but as a teen who happened to be gay. Finding my own identity has played a great role in my life, and I cannot properly express how validating finding characters like Noah can be.

*I'll Give You the Sun* was a reminder that grief is not insurmountable, that pain need not preside over my life. I have it within me to go on and live for myself, to overcome the pain that lingers within me. There is a place for me in this world, and there will come a time when I feel whole again. My life is not without purpose, and neither am I. Thank you, Jandy Nelson; it was in this book that I found the security that accompanies representation to begin reclaiming my life.

Sincerely, Isabelle