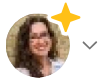


Open in app ↗



Search Medium



Published in Age of Empathy



Alesia Louise

Feb 21 · 7 min read · ✨ · 🎧 Listen

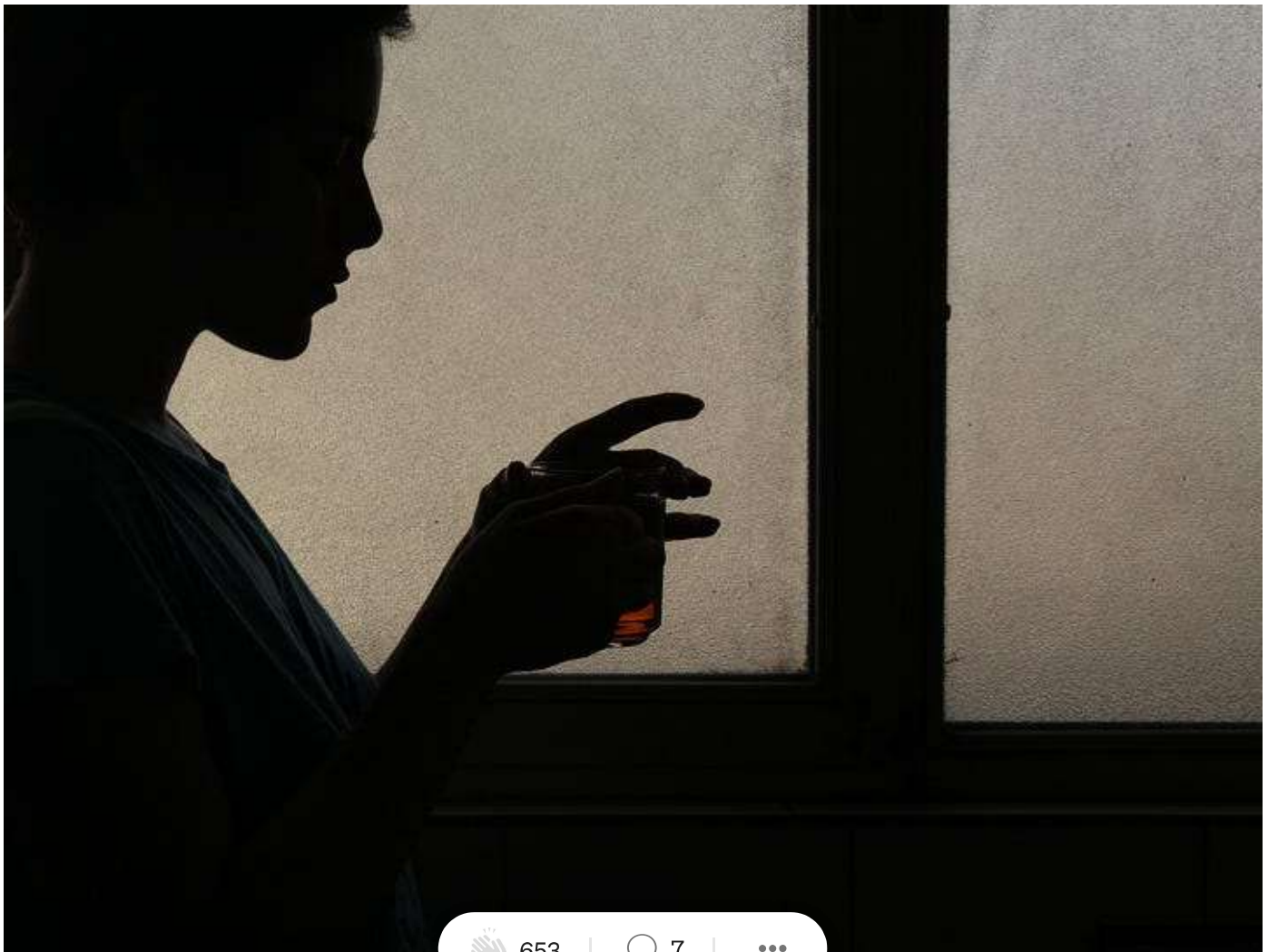


Save



Salting Away the Moonlight

Protesting the returning light



653



7



Quiet. Photo by [samane mohammadi](#) on [Unsplash](#)

An overdue rest

I sit in the window, cool white light from a waning moon shining through the frosted windowpanes playing across my skin. The Earth sleeps, blanketed in white, sparkling glitter. Stripped branches dissolve against the darkness. It's finally quiet.

There's no sound of traffic, it's too cold to be out. There's no laughing or yelling, no dogs barking, no lawnmowers or snowblowers. No intrusive thoughts or energies carelessly wandering through my spaces. No one needs me right now. Quiet.

When quiet is denied to people like me for too long, we become unwell.

Normally I stretch toward the sun, reaching for the light like a seedling on the windowsill.

This year though, the nighttime retreats too quickly. My fingers scramble across the darkness, grasping and fumbling, trying to pull the cozy quiet of this long night back over my head, wishing I could salt away the moonlight.

When the light returns, there will be no more hiding places, no more quiet mornings with the moon, no more rest. The sun will not allow me to lick my wounds forever.

This winter I've indulged in a kind of rest and comfort rarely afforded by working-class folks like me. As the sun inched further away, I inched too, tiptoeing down the stairs into the soft, cozy, dimly lit warmth of my inner world. I've spent the winter wrapped in blankets down here, sipping hot tea and nourishing myself with the kinds of comforting attention that stick to your ribs and give you substance.

I hadn't rested in so long. When I was young, I could rest in summers between school years. At that age, it looked more like chasing frogs and stomping in mud puddles. In high school, I'd spread a blanket over the soft clover at the top of the hill and disappear into the pages of an adventure, tied to this world mainly by the warmth of sunbeams on my back. By that time though, the rest was already sparse.

I wasn't tired yet, back then. It's been an exhausting couple of decades, the past few years, especially so. I thought maybe I used to be more resilient, but I'm realizing maybe no one can withstand forever. Even mountains cannot escape erosion.



Was I ever stronger? Can my shoulders still bear the weight? Photo by [Volkan Olmez](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The hard part

The hard part started just before spring 2019 when my sweetheart went into the hospital for the first of what would be 3 stays, 2 surgeries, and a year of care and recovery. In addition to the fear and worry, was the stress of arranging schedules, begging for time off work, covering all the responsibilities, making sense of the bills and paperwork and care instructions, and accommodating visits from his family — all while still parenting, still running a household, and still working full time. And missing him. I'm grateful he's still here, and that he's made a full recovery.

That fall, shortly after the third surgery, the company I worked for went through an acquisition and I, working in a support/admin role, was hit hard by the new systems to learn, and I handled an overwhelming portion of the transition work. Thankfully the new company kept all of us on through the transition.

In the winter, I added an entirely new, highly specialized function to my workload. There was no support or mentorship as I was already the most qualified person in this area. I'm thankful for the opportunities to grow.

Spring came; the whole world shut down. Like so many, I suddenly needed to juggle working from home with working on-site with schooling my child from home, all without my fragile support network. My kiddo schooled from home the whole next year too. I needed some flexibility with work, which my employer grudgingly accommodated, making sure I understood every day how much they did not like me working from home in the afternoons. I'm grateful for their flexibility.

The pressure to be on-site at work all day every day was intense. The pressure from the school to be present with my kiddo all day every day was intense. The pressure to keep up with everything at home since I was now working longer hours to make up for the time I needed to spend helping my kiddo with school didn't let up. I gained 15 pounds in a month. I could have been worse.

When school started up for the following year, each cough or sneeze meant I'd be called away from work. Each absence then required doctor visits to clear him back to school. Like many pre-teens, mine was struggling to adjust at school and the homework felt overwhelming. We'd spend hours at night re-learning what he was supposed to have learned during the day. Lucky for him, we could do that. I know not all kids could.

In the middle of the first semester, my sweetheart started a new job, which was great, as his previous job was incredibly stressful and demanding. This was a huge shift for him though and he wasn't more available at home.



Looking back, it feels heavier than it looks. Photo by [Sangga Rima Roman Selia](#) on [Unsplash](#)

I should have been okay

When I look back, it feels heavier than it looks. During this time, I also completely demolished and rebuilt my kiddo's bedroom, I adapted to countless new responsibilities at work, welcomed new nieces and nephews, and said goodbye to some loved ones too.

When my brother and his wife lost my niece just three weeks before her due date, it hit me harder than I can explain. Tears still fall on the page a year and a half later. Admittedly, I feel not fully entitled to my grief for her, she wasn't really mine to lose.

That's how I feel about all of it. That I should have been okay, none of it was really mine.

When my sweetheart was in the hospital, his family was there for him, he went through a lot. My kiddo is the one who had to cope with remote schooling and constant

disruptions, especially hard for a kiddo with ADHD. Thankfully his people came through for him too.

Even when the pandemic came — it happened *around* me more than *to* me — I didn't have it that bad. Sure work was chaotic during the initial shutdowns, but everybody has work — at least I wasn't summarily discarded like so many were. I can't even claim the stresses and burdens of working in healthcare (you people are saints). Why *should* anyone have come running to help me? I *should* have been okay.

I still broke, though. No one really even noticed.

A breaking point

In March of last year, I received my performance review at work. For four years I'd been talking to my supervisor about my position, my career path, the workload I handled, the expertise required, and so on. We talked about the additional roles I'd taken on, and it was agreed that I was doing a great job. There were, however, no more rungs on my ladder and there were no other ladders to climb. There would not now or ever be any additional compensation, promotions, or expanded titles, and even if she wanted to provide a bigger raise, it would never pace inflation.

I couldn't...

In June I submitted notice I would be leaving the company. There was dismay and protest. I agreed to stay part-time while they figured things out. There was drama and manipulation and tossing of pennies in my direction. My last day was in October, they still hadn't figured anything out by then.

I didn't see it in the hustle and bustle of daylight, I hadn't fully realized all the ways I was hurting due to that place until I left.



If I lay in the moonlight long enough, perhaps I can carry it with me for a while. Photo by [Toa Heftiba](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Collapsing into moonlight

Since October I've been collapsing — back into my home, back into my family, but mostly back into myself — and into the moonlight.

This winter I've been happy to live in my head; to keep more of my own company than I have in years, maybe decades. It's been a season of intense rest and quiet — and allowing my raw edges to heal. Sitting here in the dark has been the most comfortable I've felt in my skin, maybe since chasing frogs.

In the beginning, I thought I was regrouping from a couple of years of overwhelm, but there's more to it. Years of hollowing myself out to make room for everyone but me have taken a toll. Pretending the noise doesn't overwhelm me has made me unwell. Reaching for sunlight won't fix me.

Truth be told, I'd rather sit here in the moonlight a little longer. It's a relief to see the world in this flattering light, a relief to see clearly, without squinting and shielding my

eyes. Even though I love the feel of sunshine on my shoulders, for now, I'm salting away a little more moonlight.

Thank you to the editors of Age of Empathy for all your work reading, editing, and publishing, and for this amazing writing prompt: The Returning Light

The Returning Light: A Theme for February at Age of Empathy Publication

Something to get those creative juices flowing

[The Returning Light](#)

[Nonfiction](#)

[Writing Prompts](#)

[Rest](#)

[Self Care](#)

