

Two Old Friends

Some things I see in you, and in us

This isn't a formal thing. I've been thinking a lot about you, and about us — three years now, a rough patch last fall, and finding our way back to each other these past few weeks — and I wanted to put down, in plain words, what I actually see. No framework, no jargon. Just what paying close attention to you has shown me.

How you actually know things

You get a real answer, fast — a gut reaction that shows up before your mind has even finished asking the question. It's not vague and it's not guesswork. It's the most reliable thing about how you're built. The trouble isn't the first answer. It's what happens after it — you're so good at building a reasonable-sounding case against your own gut that you talk yourself right out of a true no, or into a yes you didn't mean. By the time you're done reasoning, it doesn't even feel like an override. It feels like being thoughtful.

Why you overthink everything

Here's the thing I don't think you give yourself credit for: a lot of that overthinking isn't actually your own mind malfunctioning. You don't walk around generating your own pressure or your own questions out of nowhere — you pick up everyone else's uncertainty, other people's unanswered questions, the mental noise of whatever room you're in, and it lands in you like it's yours to solve. So you end up running your gut's already-correct answer back through a mountain of borrowed static before you'll let yourself trust it. That's not a flaw. It's just a lot to filter through every single day.

Who you are shifts with the room

Your sense of yourself genuinely moves depending on who you're with and where you are. That's not you being evasive or hard to pin down — you don't have a fixed, unchanging self to report on the way some people do. It means the right people and the right place can bring out a version of you that the wrong ones simply can't reach. It also means the wrong environment can leave you exhausted and unsure who you even are in it, through no fault of your own.

Saying yes when you mean no

You don't have a steady, built-in sense of your own worth to lean on — so you prove it instead, by over-delivering, over-promising, saying yes when your body already said no. I think this is at its worst with your parents. The obligation isn't really about the specific ask. It's tangled up with wanting to be seen as someone who shows up, someone who's enough. And saying no risks a wave of disappointment or friction that feels unbearably loud to sit inside — so agreeing feels like the easier road, even when it costs you. Every one of those yeses you didn't mean is a debt against yourself. It's exactly the kind of thing that wears a person down rather than sustains them.

The season you're in right now

Earlier in your life — your twenties into your late twenties — was a trial-and-error stretch. Real mistakes, learning by living it, not always graceful. That's not a knock. That's just how you were always going to learn what actually works for you, because it was never going to come from being told.

Right now, in your forties, you're in a different season — a genuine pull to step back and watch before you re-engage. To be selective. To let fewer things and fewer people all the way in. From the outside that can look like distance, even coldness, but it isn't. It's discernment doing exactly what it's supposed to do at this point in your life. Eventually — and I think you're already partway there — this becomes something other people learn from just by watching how you actually live, not from anything you preach at them.

What I bring, what you bring

A few things about us specifically, because I think they're real and worth naming.

When I commit to something fully — and I do, once I'm clear — it gives you something solid to stand on. I think that's the plainest way to say what I mean to you: not that I have answers you don't, but that my steadiness gives your own sense of self something to organize around, especially when so much else about who you are is genuinely in motion.

My own restlessness — my hunger for whatever's next — tends to meet your readiness to actually start something, rather than just talk about it. That's part of why I think a real chapter is available to us right now, not hypothetically.

And I can often say what you feel but can't quite get the words around, especially in the middle of something hard. You carry the depth of it. I can carry the language for it. That's not a small thing to offer someone who spends so much of his emotional life picking up a room that was never really his to carry in the first place.

Where we're different

I take longer to know what I think. I need a feeling to move all the way through me before I'm actually clear — sometimes days. You know almost instantly. If we're not careful with each other about that gap, it can genuinely cause friction — you ready to move on something your gut already answered, me not there yet because I haven't finished catching up to my own reaction. Neither of us is wrong. It just means patience has to run both directions, not just yours toward me.

And I have a settled, fixed sense of who I am that I can lean on almost anywhere, with almost anyone. You don't have that same floor under you — yours moves with the room, same as we talked about above. I think that's exactly why I've ended up being something of an anchor point for you. It's not flattery. It's just how the two of us are actually built, next to each other.

Now

Three years in. A hard stretch last fall. Finding our way back a few weeks ago. Whatever the specifics of the break were, I don't think it means much about us being wrong for each other — two people this attuned to one another were never going to be a quiet, low-stakes friendship. The same thing that makes it feel this alive is the same thing that can run hot enough to burn.

If Vermont ever becomes real, I don't think it's really a question about a place. I think it's a question about where and with whom you actually get to feel most like yourself. That's not something I can talk you into, and I wouldn't want to. It's something that has to arrive on its own — the way your instant yes always does, before the overthinking gets to it.

Two old friends, finding each other again — and this time, I hope, staying found.

— Bill