

## **“Mixed Messages”**

The first song is for the time when I first met you. You swaggered across the room, your sex like an aura around you and my fear covering me like exotic perfume. You made some comment about my shirt, and I responded by kissing you so hard that it hurt. You kiss with your eyes open.

Making a mixed tape is a lot like telling a story. You have to consider your audience carefully. There is a certain subtlety when making a tape for the object of your affection that does not exist when making a tape for your best friend. You have to make him read between the lines in order to see what's there. How do you tell someone you love them?

Do you remember this song? We heard it that night that we stayed up all night cramming for tests. We popped popcorn and kept each other awake by throwing it at each other. It was the first time I thought you were my best friend. Who knew it would end so badly?

The next song was for the time that I sat next to you in class though we never spoke. I tried to speak, but I was stunned by your intelligence and beauty. I always thought you were so brilliant but I never told you. What would have been the point, you already knew.

It's hard to make a mixed tape. You have to choose the songs so carefully because if other people hear it, they might wonder about you. I mean, have you ever asked people what their favorite songs are? It speaks volumes about them.

This song is for the time that we sat outside a coffee shop on a lazy afternoon and talked about everything. We watched all the people go by and caught up on gossip. I forgot how much I missed you until we spoke of how different our lives had become.

I love music. Not that classical stuff, but everything from jazz to hard-core punk. I love to go to concerts, and I've got proof of every concert I've been to. I've got the tee shirts, the ticket stubs, copies of the set lists, and autographs. It seems that memories are formed from these relics.

This song was for the time that we laid in the hammock in your backyard on a lazy afternoon and talked. You told me you wanted to spend the rest of your life with me and we talked about what our kids would be named. I slept until sunrise in your arms. It felt like home, but I was too stubborn to admit I loved you too. I always was a sucker for unrequited love.

This is the song that was running through my head while I sat in your class. I took seven pages of notes on a book I didn't understand because I thought it meant something. The feeling of academia was euphoric, but I couldn't lose that song as hard as I tried. When you called on me, I stuttered out an unintelligible answer because I was too busy singing the song that was stuck in my head.

That song was for the time that we drove around in your car, screaming the lyrics out the window at anyone we passed. We drove past all the boys' houses that we liked and dreamed what it would be like to get married to them. We thought we knew what love was, and all we wanted was to live happily ever after. But we always wound up forgetting them when school was out.

This song is for the time that I tried to tell you that I loved you. We were slow dancing in the dark, with the radio from the car blaring that love song in our ears. We were drunk from the punch at that party, and euphoric with newfound love. I used to hate love songs, but they you sang this song to me. Where did you go, lover of mine?

I collect song lyrics. They're all over my wall and my dayplanner. I try to capture the beauty of life with other people's words. I steal the voices of rock stars and pop stars and jazz musicians. It's as if I'm too paralyzed to speak for myself.

This song reminded me of the time that I thought I hated you. You wore your pretension on your sleeve, checking your cell phone for messages before class started. I thought you wanted to be important or maybe you really were and I hadn't noticed. Either way, I changed my mind when you turned to me and asked to borrow a pen.

That ballad about love and friendship was for the time that you sat with me on the front stairs and held me while I cried. I had to lie to the one I admired the most, and my world was crumbling. I thought she would hate me forever, but you held me and spoke kind words to me, telling me it would be okay. I felt like a traitor, but you saw right through the tears.

One more thing about mixed tapes that I forgot to tell you. When you make them, you have to make sure you don't cut the song off before it's done. You have to have every note, every verse, every chorus. If you don't, it ruins the song and the person you're making the tape for gets mad. Mixed tapes are a form of rejection or acceptance, because music is life and love.

I usually hate songs live, but do you remember when we heard this song live? They ushered us out of the building because the acoustics sucked, and played it for us outside. Three hundred people singing along with a band while the cops waited to arrest us for something, maybe it was singing too loud without a recording contract.

The great thing about mixed tapes is that you can erase them and start over. If a relationship ends, you can erase the tape you made and record a tape for the new, and more worthy of your affection, crush in you life. Of if you can't find the perfect way to say what you have to say, you can mix the tape over and over until you get it right. That's why mixed tapes are better than life. Because you have infinite chances to make it perfect.

The last song on this tape? It reminds me of when I told you that you were my hero and you laughed at me. I said that you had so many of the qualities that I wished I had, and you told me that you were the last person that should be anyone's hero. Maybe you were right; maybe you aren't hero material. But I would love to have thought so. But you knocked yourself down off the pedestal that I made for you. And you kept on walking, singing that song over and over again.

-Erin Ruttle

