

Dear Judy Garland,

I thought of writing to you, because *The Wizard of Oz* is still my favorite movie. My mom would always put it on when I stayed home sick from school. She would give me ginger ale with pink plastic ice cubes and cinnamon toast, and you would be singing “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.”

I realize now that everyone knows your face. Everyone knows your voice. But not everyone knows where you were really from, when you weren’t from the movies.

I can imagine you as a little girl on a December day in the town where you grew up on the edge of Mojave Desert, tap-tap-tap-dancing onstage in your daddy’s movie theater. Singing your jingle bells. You learned right away that applause sounds like love.

I can imagine you on summer nights, when everyone would come to the theater to get out of the heat. Under the refrigerated air, you would be up onstage, making the audience forget for the moment that there was anything to be afraid of. Your mom and dad would smile up at you. They looked the happiest when you were singing.

Afterward, the movie would pass by in a blur of black and white, and you would get suddenly very sleepy. Your daddy would carry you outside, and it was time to drive home in his big car, like a boat swimming over the dark asphalt surface of the earth.

You never wanted anyone to be sad, so you kept singing. You’d sing yourself to sleep when your parents were fighting. And when they weren’t fighting, you’d sing to make them laugh. You used your voice like glue to keep your family together. And then to keep yourself from coming undone.

My mom used to sing me and May to sleep with a lullaby. Her voice would croon, “*all bound for morning town...*” She would stroke my hair and stay until I slept. When I couldn’t sleep, she would tell me to imagine myself in a bubble over the sea. I would close my eyes and float there, listening to the waves. I would look down at the shimmering water. When the bubble broke, I would hear her voice, making a new bubble to catch me. [...]

I wish you could tell me where you are now. I mean, I know you’re dead, but I think there must be something in a human being that can’t just disappear. It’s dark out. You’re out there. Somewhere, somewhere. I’d like to let you in.

Yours,

Laurel

Ava DELLAIRA, *Love Letters to the Dead*, 2014