

This idea is inspired by this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyqMHR7svj0>), which breaks down Red's tracklist as a study in contrasts. Basically, grouping the tracklist into pairs of two (or three), and seeing how the lyrics in those two songs contrast or compliment each other. This alternative tracklist takes into account the bonus tracks and new vault tracks as well.

Important to note: "State of Grace (Acoustic)" has been removed due to it being a lyrical duplicate, and to keep the tracklist at an even number, both versions of All Too Well have been merged into the singular 10 Minute Version. This leaves us with **28 tracks** in total.

If you would like to listen to the album in this order, here's the playlist! ❤️
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1clMjKxCOowxuPKDnKvF8k?si=d8de4c7d2b9f4a17>

1. State of Grace - The album opener. Kicks off this kaleidoscope of emotions with the central theme of this album: love, and all the complicated emotions that embody it. The passion, the excitement, the fondness and the comfort, as well as the heartbreak, the anger, the loss and the grief. This song is a tumultuous flurry of excitement and fear, apprehension and jumping into free-fall, and generally takes a more positive approach to the daunting idea of love.

"This is a state of grace, this is the worthwhile fight. Love is a ruthless game unless you play it good and right."

2. Red - A smooth sonic transition out of the opener. Continues on with the themes established in State of Grace, exploring the complex feelings of love and painting it in vivid color. This song takes a closer look at the negative repercussions of love, being told in past tense as opposed to State of Grace's present tense. Red dives into the feelings of chaos, of fleeting passion and emotions that linger long after the love is gone, like the embers of a flame.

"Regretting him was like wishing you never found out that love could be that strong."

3. Treacherous - A breather, and a bit of a zoom in. Rather than looking at love as a whole, this song explores the act of falling in love with someone you know you might not stay with. The idea of losing something so precious is scary, but the thrill of the love itself is too much to leave it alone. This song paints that exhilaration in an idealistic light, almost romanticizing it. This is an act of playing with fire.

"This daydream is dangerous. This slope is treacherous, and I like it."

4. I Knew You Were Trouble - If Treacherous is playing with fire, IKYWT is the result: getting burned. You knew this relationship would probably not work out, yet you dove in headfirst anyway. Much like State of Grace/Red, this song is written in past tense as a retrospective, while Treacherous is written in present tense. These two songs explore the same sensation of falling, but from different perspectives: the flying, and then the bone crush.

"I knew you were trouble when I walked in, so shame on me now."

5. The Moment I Knew - The first major change on the list. Still retains the common staples of a Taylor "Track 5," being an emotional tearjerker and a personal deep cut, but is a bit more of a direct contrast to the song that follows it than All Too Well is on its own. This song captures the moment of being abandoned on your birthday by perhaps the only person you actually wanted to be there. It's a moment of sadness and despair, tragedy frozen in time, and painting one of the most important milestones in your life a deep shade of blue. (Additional fun fact: Taylor mentioned in the 1989 GrammyPro talk that she considered the cello to sound very sad, and the cello is a very important instrument in the production of this, more than it is in any of Taylor's other work.)

"What do you say when tears are streaming down your face in front of everyone you know? And what do you do when the one who means the most to you is the one who didn't show?"

6. 22 - The polar opposite of The Moment I Knew. After the devastation of being abandoned on a 21st birthday, this song decides, you know what? Men are trash, actually, and I'm going to celebrate my 22nd birthday with people who actually love me—my friends and family. Maybe flirt a little bit, too, who knows! This song is pure joy and all fun, less about romantic love, and more about self-love and appreciation for the friends around you. It also contextually makes for a strong contrast to The Moment I Knew. Taylor was left alone on her 21st birthday, so she made sure to have a blast on her 22nd.

"We're happy, free, confused, and lonely at the same time. It's miserable and magical."

7. I Almost Do - Another moment of the magnifying glass moving in. This time, we focus on the time shortly after a relationship has ended. This song focuses on the struggle to find that new normal, to not reach out because you know you're just going to go through the same pain again. The temptation remains ever-present, and even though the singer doesn't give in, she hopes that her lover is going through the same sort of thing, so that she isn't left alone in all this. She hopes this love affair has maimed him, too.

"I bet it never, ever occurred to you that I can't say hello to you and risk another goodbye."

8. I Bet You Think About Me - This song's placement is due to the themes and lyrics of I Almost Do: "I bet/I hope sometimes you wonder 'bout me." However, while I Almost Do is steeped in the melancholy of missing someone, IBYTAM is carefree and completely over it. The singer of IBYTAM no longer hopes or expects the other person to be looking at them with regret and longing, but rather expects them to regard the whole situation as something beneath them. This song, while exploring the same sort of themes as I Almost Do, does it with a completely polar opposite tone.

"I bet you couldn't believe when you realized I'm harder to forget than I was to leave."

9. We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together - A playful, lighthearted breakup song. Very "glitter gel pen." This song reflects on a relationship with a multitude of ups and downs, in which

the two involved had a very on-again off-again style of dating. This song put the foot down and says, no more of this. Even though the production is very fun and enjoyable, the ultimate thesis of this song is that a relationship is ending.

"He calls me up and he's like, "I still love you!" And I'm like... I mean, this is exhausting, you know? Like, we are never getting back together. Like ever."

10. Stay Stay Stay - Equally as playful and lighthearted as the last song, but about a completely different subject matter. Though the two involved in this song appear to have been close to a breakup at the start of the narrative, this song ultimately explores the want to stay together, and details all the positive aspects that this person brings into the singer's life.

"I want to hang out with you for my whole life. Stay, and I'll be loving you for quite some time."

11. The Very First Night - Despite the poppy and upbeat production, the lyrics of this song seem to have relatively bittersweet undertone. In this song, the singer seems to be reflecting upon a relationship that has recently ended, or has at least taken some sort of negative turn. The singer is going out, pretending things are normal, and attempting to relate to their friends, but nothing seems to work. All she can think about is their fun moments together, the way their relationship started with sparks and affection, and how that contrasts with the way things are now. She wishes she could fly, go back in time to change what went wrong, and go back to the way things used to be. The upbeat nature of this song suggests that, perhaps, this relationship can be reconciled.

"I wish I could fly. I'd pick you up, and we'd go back in time. I'd write this in the sky: I miss you like it was the very first night."

12. The Last Time - Also a relationship in its final stage, with at least one party wanting to change or apologize for wrongdoing, but significantly less positive. It feels as though the man in this relationship is coming to look for another chance, but the woman knows that his apology does not mean he will actually change. ("You *wear* your best apology" signifying that the apology is something that can be taken on and off at will, like clothing. Just a facade.) There is no saving this. This conversation is the last exchange they will ever have in this relationship. The titles also direct their focuses in different directions—the very *first* night versus the *last* time.

"This is the last time I tell you I got it wrong. This is the last time I say it's been you all along. This is the last time I let you in my door. This is the last time, I won't hurt you anymore."

13. Holy Ground - Like many other songs on this album, this song reflects on a relationship in its aftermath. However, unlike the last 2 songs and how those focus on a desire to save what remains, the relationship is already long gone at the start of Holy Ground. That doesn't mean it's remembered in a negative light, however; on the contrary, this song is a celebration for something that never lasted long, but was beautiful while it did. It acknowledges all the positive

feelings that came from being with this person, and even a desire from the singer to keep them in their life in some regard. It didn't last, but it was sacred and holy nonetheless.

"Tonight I'm gonna dance for all that we've been through. But I don't wanna dance if I'm not dancing with you."

14. Sad Beautiful Tragic - Yet another reflection on a relationship that's long since ended. In contrast to Holy Ground, however, this song *does* lean into the negative aspects of grieving the relationship. It wasn't an easy relationship, full of fights and miscommunications, but that doesn't make it easy to move on from. It's a struggle for the singer to forget this person. The singer assumes that their ex is dealing with the same sort of ghosts, because she can't be the only one haunted by this affair, right? This song's title and chorus harken back to themes present in Red, State of Grace, and even 22—the complicated ways multiple emotions can present themselves when it comes to love.

"We had a beautiful, magic love there. What a sad, beautiful, tragic love affair."

15. Forever Winter - This song explores the desire to be there for a loved one who is struggling with their own personal or mental problems, and the frustration of not necessarily being able to get through to them. Despite this, the singer vows to always remain there for their friend, no matter how bad their thoughts get, or how much faith they lose in the world around them.

"I say, believe in one thing: I won't go away."

16. Ronan - This song reflects on the loss of a loved one, specifically a mother losing her child to cancer. Rather than exploring emotions entwined in romantic love, both Ronan and Forever Winter explore unconditional familial love and friendship. They are both deeply emotional and personal songs, and are paired on this tracklisting due to their external contexts (Ronan being inspired by Maya Thompson's blog about her son's cancer journey, and Forever Winter being supposedly inspired by/preceding the suicide of a close friend of Taylor).

"I love you to the moon and back."

17. Nothing New - A jaded look at fame and the life of a pop star who's been lorded as being at the "top of their game." Pop artists, especially female pop artists, are expected by audiences to reinvent themselves and deliver new art each time they release something. They worry about going "stale," and losing the fans they've spend years growing along with. This song explores that specific fear, as well as they hypocrisy of the media, and how no matter what someone does, an artist can never please everybody.

"How does a person know everything at 18, but nothing at 22? And will you still want me when I'm nothing new?"

18. The Lucky One - Another deconstruction of fame and what it means to be a public figure in Hollywood. This song feels a little bit like it's speaking to the older aesthetics of famous actors

from the Golden Age of Cinema. Though personally, I like to think that this song is from the perspective of the "she" referenced in Nothing New's bridge ("she'll know the way in and she'll say she got the map from me"), further enforcing the female pop star cycle. The singer of Nothing New got out and away, but it took the singer of The Lucky One too long to understand why, and by that point, they were already being blinded by the lights themselves.

"Now my name is up in lights, but I think you got it right."

19. Everything Has Changed - Gradually moving out of heavier/sadder topics, this song explores an aspect of love we haven't heard much of on this album yet: pure fondness and adoration. To me, this song reads a bit like a story of childhood friends to lovers, and the moment where they realize that their simple friendship has blossomed into something more.

"All I know is you said hello, and your eyes look like coming home."

20. Starlight - Another positive, thrilling song about love and the happiness it can bring. This song is specifically an imagining of the relationship between Bobby and Ethel Kennedy, but in general, this song feels like if 22 was written to be about romantic love rather than self-love and friendship. Upbeat, with its focus on the future and the positive outcomes of this love.

"Don't you see the starlight, starlight? Don't you dream impossible things?"

21. Girl At Home - This pair of songs focuses on specific actions by men, and points out the harm in them while simultaneously being backed by upbeat, engaging production. This song is a talking-down to a man who attempts to get with another girl at a party, despite already having a girlfriend. The singer also insinuates that she's been in the opposite position before, where her own partner made moves on someone else despite dating the singer. Despite the topic, this song takes a lighthearted approach, given how it's from the perspective of the girl who's rejecting the man.

"It would be a fine proposition, if I hadn't once been just like her."

22. Babe - Similar to Girl at Home, Babe reflects on the aftermath of a man having an affair outside of his relationship with the singer. Unlike Girl at Home, where the singer is the potential "other woman," the singer of Babe is the one who has been in a relationship with the man for a while. While this song is mostly lighthearted, this fact makes the song as a whole take a more melancholic approach, as the singer reflects on the way this act of cheating has and continues to affect them.

"I hate that because of you, I can't love you, babe."

23. Message In A Bottle - Back again to the sensations described back in State of Grace and Red, this song explores the excitement of a new love. However, it also touches on fears that remain after old relationships, as well as a new fear of how distance will impact this relationship. The singer wants to make this work, and knows that the spark is felt by both of them, but is

terrified that they will be crushed by separation. The idea of communicating via "message in a bottle" could potentially mean two things: long distance communication, waiting with bated breath for a reply they can't see coming,. Or, perhaps there is a new fear of outside influences on their relationship, and a desire to keep this thing a secret between them, communicating via private letters and calls.

"I'm reaching for you, terrified, cause you could be the one that I love, and I could be the one you dream of. Message in a bottle is all I can do, standing here hoping it gets to you."

24. Come Back...Be Here - Another reflection of that fear of distance that was established in Message In A Bottle. Though this relationship is new and tentative, it's something that the singer wants to nurture, and she's fallen hard already. This person has only been gone for a short while, and already her heart is aching to be with them.

"This is when the feeling sinks in, I don't wanna miss you like this."

25. Run - In Run, a relationship has begun to make some serious headway, but as potentially indicated in Message In A Bottle, there is this growing fear regarding public and external perception of their relationship. This song explores a desire to run away and disappear with their lover to someplace just for the two of them, where no one else can see them. Perhaps this also connects to the feelings expressed in Come Back...Be Here, where the singer worries about distance impacting her relationship, and longs to be physically present with her lover. Though paired with Better Man, Run is meant to have a stronger connection to the two previous songs.

"We can go where our eyes can take us, go where no one else is. Run."

26. Better Man - In Better Man, a relationship has already ended. Despite being alone, however, the singer laments the fact that she is no longer with this person. This song explores her desire to still be with him, though she's very aware of the fact that it would just end in ruin again. This person is not a good man, or at least, he's not good for her. This is another song, like I Almost Do, that touches on the complexity of emotions that come with a breakup. Though paired with Run, Better Man is meant to have a stronger connection to the two following songs.

"Sometimes, in the middle of the night, I can feel you again. But I just miss you and I just wish you were a better man."

27. All Too Well (10 Minute Version) - Although undoubtedly this album's magnum opus, thematically, this song fits just slightly better as the prelude to the closer. If Better Man is the hope that these two could have been something more had this man just been a better person, ATW is the breakdown of what exactly that man did that ended the possibility of them ever making something work between them. This song is full of heavy emotions—grief over the loss of what was, at one point, an important relationship, anger over the way they were treated in said relationship, affection for memories that still remain fond to them, and desperation to get answers to questions that have plagued the singer for months. This song feels like winter

condensed into musical form, a cold retelling of what was once something magical that had long since frozen over. But as biting as that chill may have been, at least the snow was pretty when it was falling. At least we can learn from these sorts of tumultuous relationships.

"You call me up again just to break me like a promise, so casually cruel in the name of being honest."

28. Begin Again - The album closer. Both in the standard edition and here, I feel that this song is a brilliant bookend to the chaotic kaleidoscope that is this album, and also leaves with a much kinder message than All Too Well. As beautiful as it is, it is still tinged with melancholy, and carries the weight of all the questions we may never get an answer to. If we kicked this whole thing off with color and excitement, a flurry of absolutely everything love can be, it feels fitting to end with a calmer song that reflects on all of it. That says yes, love can burn as bright as a star, and fall and fade just as fast. But every ending brings about new beginnings, and love can also bloom like a spring rose. A thaw to the long winter, pained in bright and brilliant **red. ♥**

"I've been spending the last 8 months thinking all love ever does is break and burn and end. But on a Wednesday, in a cafe, I watched it begin again."