



the stories of
women

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Swing State 20101204

original music, video,
poetry & stories read
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trying

trying to revitalize
this old, tired marriage

once I wore a black teddy
thong back
beaded front

walked up to him while
he was watching
a basketball game,
sitting on the couch

sat on his lap
straddled him

and he looked at me
and reached his arm around
and tried to
grab his beer

i want love

i'm laying here in bed
and i'm looking over at him

he's sound asleep
perfectly happy

you know, i can't remember
the last time he's held me

he has no idea what i'm thinking
he's perfectly content this way

i decided to spend the rest
of my life with him

he's my best friend
but i don't know if he loves me

damnit
i want love

too far

When he met me
he told me
I looked like
Kim Basinger
long blonde locks
but as time
wore on I knew
I wasn't her
and I could never
be her and I was
never good enough
thin enough
pretty enough
I got a perm
straightened my
teeth
bought a wonder
bra but it wasn't
doing the trick
I bought slimfast
used the stair
stepper ate rice
cakes and wheat
germ but I wasn't
thin enough I
only dropped
twenty pounds

so I went to the
spa got my skin
peeled soaked
myself in mud
wrapped myself
in cellophane
bought the amino
acid facial creams
but I knew they
didn't really
work so I went to
the doctor got my
nose slimmed
my tummy stapled
my thighs sucked
thought about
getting a rib or two
removed
like Cher
but I figured
they've got to
be there for
something
and hey, that's
just going
too far

how to please a woman

i saw a movie once
can't remember what movie it was, but
i remember this one scene:
it was after the protagonist couple made love,
and it was the middle of the night,
and the man got dressed and went outside,
and no, it was not to leave
(i know half of you were thinking that, admit it)

but he went outside, into the garden
and picked a bunch of flowers
and put them all over the bed.
So in the morning, when the woman woke up,
she was still alone, but she was surrounded in flowers.

now, i know it's just a movie,
but i have these visions in my head
of how perfect life is supposed to be.
okay, okay, call it being raised on Cinderella
and Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, but
in the back of my mind i still have this vision in my head
of being swept away. Wake me with a
kiss. Ride me off into the sunset.

i don't want to tell someone how to
sweep me off my feet, how to be romantic.
Part of romance is the element of surprise.
yes, i know, this is the age of communication
and we're supposed to tell each other how we feel
but i guess, as unreasonable as this is
about to sound, i want you to be able to read my mind.
Or don't read it, and completely catch me off guard
(and i mean that in a good way - don't catch me
off guard, for instance, by watching baseball
instead of celebrating my birthday).

sure, it could be flowers, i guess, but don't think that we're trying to get you to spend your money or that we're trying to milk you for all you're worth because flowers picked from your garden - or someone else's - are often better than the ones from the store. Maybe a bath. a picnic. those are even better than flowers, because they give the gift we really want - time. we want to know you are not only taking time out to be with us, but that you took the time to plan it to make it perfect.

we want you to tell us we look pretty when we need to hear it. you don't know when we need to hear it? just look into our eyes. you'll know. we want you to look excited to see us when you come home from work, even if you're tired and just want to eat. we want to feel like we mean the world to you, like we mean more than a beer does to you while you're sitting on the couch watching sitcoms. we want foreplay to mean more than "oh, i've grabbed her chest, now it's time to insert."

we want poetry written for us: the sun rises and it means nothing without us, that kind of stuff. okay, you're not a poet: maybe you could write us a letter every once in a while. oh, i know, it's that damn time thing again, but that's what it takes, remember? even a note just saying "i love you" on it would be enough. here's an idea: drop it in the mail. i know you see us every day; that's what makes it special.

i'm thinking about myself too much

all of my life it
has all been about you
what do you need
what do you want
how can i help you
what can i do for you
and now for once
i start to live
and now you tell me
that i'm thinking about
myself too much
and i think back to
all the time i've
spent with you
and all the care
i've given you
and now you tell me
that i'm thinking about
myself too much
and i've cooked for
you and i've cleaned
for you and i've made
sure everything in
your world made sense
and now you tell me
that i'm thinking about
myself too much
and all i can think
is that you're only angry
because i'm thinking
about me at all

Raped With Words

I knew a woman
who went on a date
with a friend of mine,
and after the date
he talked about how great she was,
he told me how they talked about their future
and what they both wanted
he described the inside of her place,
but after he left messages for her repeatedly,
she never called him back again

saw this woman weeks later
at a Starbuck's
and she said she felt bad she had been avoiding hm
but she never wanted to see him again
because during their date
they never talked about what they wanted
he just talked about what he wanted
like how she wouldn't hold a job
she'd be taking care of the house
the man's the one that makes the money
and he even told her how many
of his children she would bear

she wouldn't let him into her home
(does that mean he was looking through her window?)
and she said that after the date
she showered for hours
because she felt like she had been raped

and you know, hearing her story
it made me realize
that you can rape someone
with words

based on portions of the poem "Key To Survival"

women's very existence

*rape is neither a sex crime
or a crime of passion*

*rape is not an isolated brutal crime
against women*

*rape is often premeditated
rape is a crime of violence
rather than sex
it is a crime of violence
against women*

*it is an attack by men
on women's bodies
on women's feelings
on women's very existence*

- Bob Lamm, 1976

i still have to take showers a lot. i mean, every once in a while, no matter how clean i am to the rest of the world, i have to go take a shower. i lock all the doors, i close the shades on the windows, i put a towel over the bathroom mirror. turn the water on, piping hot, so steam is billowing out of the bath tub. i finally undress, open the curtain, put my foot in, burn my foot with the water. i wish i could hold my foot there, just a little longer. i turn down the water. wait for it to cool down, then step in. then i just put my head under the shower head. hold it there for a while. catch my breath. get the soap. start scrubbing. i use the soap first, then i get the bath brush. scrub off a layer of skin. i know this makes no sense. my skin is red, from the heat, from the scrubbing. but i know i'm still not getting it off, it's down there, the molecules are embedded deep inside of me, and i'll have to rip my skin off, pull out my organs before it goes away. but for now all i can do is take showers.

white knuckled

The hot air was sticking
to her skin almost pulling
tugging at her very
flesh as she walked
outside down the
stairs from the train
station. Just then a
breeze hot and
sticky hit her
in just the wrong
way, brushed against her
lower neck, and she
felt his breath again,
not his breath
when he raped
her, but his stench
hot rank
when he was
just close to her.
Her breath quickened,
like the catch of her
breath when she has
just stopped

crying. All the emotion
is still there not
going away. She
walks to the bottom
of the stairs, railing
white-knuckled by her
small tender hands,
the hands of a child,
and that ninety degree
breeze suddenly
gives her a
chill. They say when
you get a chill it means
a goose walked
over your grave.
She knows better. She knows
that it is him
walking, and that
he trapped that child in
that grave

Driving By His House

I know it's pretty pathetic of me, I don't know what I'm trying to prove. I don't even want to see him again. I don't want to have to think about him, I don't want to think about his big eyebrows or the fact that he hunched over a little when he walked or that he hurt me so much.

I know it's pretty pathetic of me, but sometimes when I'm driving I'll take a little detour and drive by his house. I'll just drive by, I won't slow down, I won't stop by, I won't say hello, I won't beat his head in, I won't even cry. I'll just drive by, see a few cars in the driveway, see no signs of life through the windows, and then I'll just keep driving.

I don't know why I do it. He never sees me, and I never see him, although I thought I didn't want to see him anyway. When I first met him I wasn't afraid of him. Now I'm so afraid that I have to drive by his house every once in a while, just to remind myself of the fear. We all like the taste of fear, you know, the thought that there's something out there stronger than us. The thought that there's something out there we can beat, even if we have to fight to the death.

But that can't be it, no, it just can't be, I don't like this fear, I don't like it. I don't want to drive by, I want to be able to just go on with my life, to not think about it. I want to be strong again. I want to be strong.

So today I did it again, I haven't done it for a while, drive by his house, but I did it again today. When I turned on to his street I put on my sunglasses so that in case he saw me he couldn't tell that I was looking. And then I picked up my car phone and acted like I was talking to someone.

And I drove by, holding my car phone, talking to my imaginary friend, trying to unobviously glance at the house on my left. There's a lamppost at the end of his driveway. I always noticed it, the lamphshade was a huge glass ball, I always thought it was ugly. This time three cars were there. One of those could have been his. Through the front window, no people, no lights. I drive around a corner, take a turn and get back on the road I was supposed to be on.

One day, when I'm driving by and I get that feeling again, that feeling like death, well then, I just might do it again.

content with inferior men

there are some theorists that say
that women need to be able to look up to a man
in order to feel complete. these theorists
would say that a woman could not be president,
at least not on a personal level.
think of it - here is a woman, the most important
person on earth, and she would never know of anyone
who had more power than her. how could she
look up to any man? how could she admire
any man? how could she respect any man?
and you know, i can kind of see that point,
how can you love someone you don't respect,
i mean, i want someone in my life that can teach
me something, that can help me grow, and if
i was the most powerful person on earth
i would probably think that no one could teach
me anything. but the only thing i could think of
in response to this theory is, why don't men
who are the presidents of the united states
of america find themselves unhappy with their
boring, unequal, supportive wives? why is it
that men are content with inferior women
but women aren't content with inferior men?

the Fourteenth

grade school, lace and construction paper cut outs -
mimicking our hearts with school glue, a
sixty-four pack of crayons,
a doily, perhaps, and a child's scribbings,
"Be My Valentine." The beginning of every cold February
the classes of children are taught to make enough little hearts
for everyone, so that no one may be disappointed,
so that everyone can be your Valentine.
Nonetheless, one little child's construction paper mailbox
come February fourteenth
always had less than everyone else's.

And then it gets easier as the years go on
mommies buy little packs of Valentine cards
for their children to sign and give away to all the little
children at school. Saves them from having to
make all those cards,
the glue and the glitter and the cut-outs are messy.

Every fourteenth, second month
when I was little
I remember daddy bringing heart-shaped boxes
home for all the girls -
myself, my sister, my mother. I can remember mother now,
her candy box on her ironing board, thanking him once again
for the lovely gift. And so it goes.

And the card shops get fuller this time every year
husbands saying "my wife will kill me
if I don't get her a card" or young women complaining
"my boss told me to get a card for his wife"

And the flowers seem the same, don't they? Carnations
arranged in a big ball atop a little basket. Red,
yellow, pink, white. Lovely.
All the adornments of the holiday. Don't stop short of the best.

A girlfriend said to me once
she's sure boyfriends break up with you by the
beginning of February so they don't have to
buy you anything. So they don't have to say they love you.
Last year I spent Valentine's Day
taking those chalky hearts with messages on them
and scribbling my own on the back.
"Screw You", "Go Away", "Leave Me Alone." I never
liked the taste of those candies.
And the Valentine's Day party,
where all the single people were thinking,
"Please give me someone to go home with. Don't let me
be alone tonight."

And the women getting lonely
and the married couples arguing
and the suicide rate going up

And the woman looking at the carnations on her
dining room table
holding the card in her hand that says "love, Jake"
wondering why it doesn't feel good yet

a woman talking about her rapist friend

He was my friend, and we had been
through a lot together, our psychological
ups and downs,

but he mixed drinks exceptionally well
at his college frat parties, and his
ice-blue eyes

always spoke the truth to me. It's amazing
to think that the only reason we ever met
was because one day

he wore a turtleneck that perfectly
matched his eyes, and I had to tell him.
I don't know why

he put up with my mood swings, with my
self-destructive social life and man-hating,
normally he didn't

care about women, never gave their opinions
much thought, just tried to get them
drunk at parties,

maybe he knew that and that's why he
listened to me. Then for a few years
our friendship

drifted, we didn't see each other much,
I heard through the grapevine that he was
failing in school.

Then one day, out of the blue, he comes
over and he has two black eyes. And he
says to me

that when he was in the parking garage
two guys came and beat him up, and one
of them said,

you raped my girlfriend. And then he looked
at me and said, and you know, looking back,
he was right.

I raped her. And I know he wanted sym-
pathy, he wanted to hear me say something,
but I couldn't.

And he said, I know this has to be hard for
you to hear, but I wanted to tell you. I know
it was wrong.

A part of me wanted to hate him. A part of
me thought that if he was my friend I would
be condoning

what he did. And a part of me thought that
our friendship made him realize what he
actually had done.

I tried to be there for him. I wasn't much
good at it. Eventually, he moved away.
I didn't try

to lose touch with him. But it's just that a
part of me is still trying to figure out if I
can be his friend.

Sometimes you just lose touch with some-
one, sometimes that's all you can do.

Knowledge

I hated going into these God damn gas stations in the middle of nowhere, but we'd been driving for so damn long that I think I lost all feeling in my ass. Besides, I had to go to the bathroom. It couldn't wait. He said he'd pump the gas this time, so I got out of the car and began to stretch when I saw the attendant staring at me through the window from behind the counter. It was an eerie stare. A sex stare. I stopped stretching.

I walked around the side of the building, where the dingy arrows pointed to the washrooms. I really didn't need the signs, for the smell of shit that has been sitting around overpowered the smell of the dust in the air as I walked closer and closer to the bathrooms ... I walked past the men's room and up to the ladies room to find that the door was... gone. It was propped up on the inside of the bathroom wall. "A lot of fucking good it does me there," I mumbled in the stench.

"How the Hell am I supposed to go to the bathroom when there isn't even a God damned door to the damn bathroom??" I thought as I stormed into the store where he was paying for the gas.

He was buying two bottles of Pepsi for the road, to keep us awake. "The door of the women's washroom is off," I whispered with exasperation. "Well, that's no problem, honey -- just go into the men's room. I'll watch the door for you," he said back. The look in his eyes told me that he thought it was such a simple and obvious solution that anyone could figure it out. He thought he had the solution for everything. I wanted to tell him that the women's room frightened me enough for one day, and that I didn't want to risk my life by venturing into the men's room. Besides, men go in there. That attendant probably goes in there. I finally shrugged and waited for him to pay for his Pepsi and gasoline. I turned my head and followed him out. The attendant looked at me as I left. I could feel his stare burning into the back of my head.

We turned the building corner and followed the signs. My shoulders suddenly felt heavier and heavier as I walked. He checked the room to make sure it was empty for me. He even held the door open. What a gentleman.

I closed the door, but I really didn't want to be left alone with the smell. It smelled like shit. But I could also smell sweat, like the smell of dirty men. I wondered if this is what the attendant smelled like. I lined the toilet bowl seat with toilet paper, which I had to use it sparingly -- there wasn't much toilet paper there. I got up as soon as I possibly could and walked over to the dirty mirror, almost hitting my head on the hanging light bulb. There was light blue paint chipping next to the mirror.

I strained to see my image in the mirror. Instead, all I could focus on was the graffiti on the wall behind me. For a good time call... So-and-so gives good head... Did that attendant ever call that number? I wondered if I was ever put on a bathroom wall. I wondered if I was ever reduced to a name and a phone number like that. I probably had been.

The floor was wet. I always wondered when the floors of bathrooms were wet if it was actually urine or just water from the sink. Or maybe it was from the sweat of all those men. I didn't know.

I stepped on something under the sink in front of the mirror. I looked down. It was an open porn magazine. I looked at it from where I was standing. I didn't move my foot. It was hard core shit, and it looked painful. Women with gags on their faces... I remember someone telling me that porn was okay because the women in it wanted to do it. But there was no smile on this woman's face. I pushed it back under the sink.

I stepped back. I wanted to hit something. I wanted to hit the graffiti on the wall, the porn on the floor. I wanted to smear the urine from the stall all over the place. I wanted to pull the light from right out of the fucking ceiling.

I put my hands up against the wall. I put the top of my head on the wall. I tried to breathe. It hurt. With my eyes closed, I knew what was there, behind me. It didn't scare me anymore.

When I walked into the bathroom, I was afraid to touch anything. But then I just leaned up against the door, feeling the dirt press into my back, into my hair. I wanted to soak it all in. All of it.

I shook my head and realized that he was waiting for me outside the door. I turned around and grabbed the door knob. I didn't worry about the dirt on my back. I opened the door.

in the air

(portions of part two)

Have you ever noticed that the air isn't normal air in an airplane? I mean, I know they have to pump in the air, and pressurize it and all in order to keep us alive up there, but there's just something about the air in the cabin that's different. It's got a smell to it, that's the only way I can describe it. A smell of all these people, going places, running to something, or running away from it.

But once, when I was on a flight back from D. C., a flight attendant walked by, stack of magazines in her hand, Time, Newsweek, Businessweek, and I stopped her, asking what magazines she had. And she replied, "Oh, these magazines are for men." This is a true story. And I asked her again what she had. I had already read Time, so I took Newsweek.

the martyr and the saint

they gave their daughter the name
of the Patron Saint of television

and the television's always been
one thing she hated about him

or was it the drinking that he needed
more than her

the business has gone bad
I'm a failure I'm not a man

he said he respected her
then he'd call her

a twenty dollar whore from Vegas

and the mother would hold
the child, the saint, the pure angel

hold her ears and hope she
couldn't hear

Right There, By Your Heart

verses 2 and 6

have you ever had that feeling before, you know, the one when someone is telling you something you don't want to hear, like if someone was about to tell you that someone died and you knew what they were going to say and you still didn't want to hear it, or if someone did something to you you didn't like, like when you were little and the kids at the bus stop shot pebbles and spit balls at you every day because you were smart and you still had to go to the bus stop every morning and just try to ignore them? and when that happens it feels like a medium sized rock just fell into the bottom of your stomach, and you don't want to move because you're afraid that the rock will hurt the inside of your stomach and so you just have to sit there and hope the rock goes away? or else you get the feeling in your chest, right between your lungs, it feels like someone is pressing against the bone there, right there by your heart, and you've got to breathe, you're not going to be able to take that pressure, that force any longer?

don't know how many times the idea of seeing him went through my mind. at least once a week i'd imagine a scene where he'd confront me, and i'd somehow be able to fight him back, to show him that he didn't bother me any more, to show him that the rock wasn't there any more. to somehow be able to prove that i wasn't a victim any more. i was a survivor. that's what they call it now, you see, survivor, because victim sounds too trying for someone who has been raped. so i keep saying i'm over it but i keep imagining mark all over again, not raping me, but following me on the street, coming to my door with flowers, or sending me a valentine. but once, when i saw him walking out of a record store as i was walking in, the rock fell so hard that i thought i was going to be sick right there by the cash register, right there by those metal things at the doorway that beep when you try to take merchandise out of the store, you know what those things are, i just can't think of what they're called. but if i did that, then he'd know he was still winning, to this day. how many years has it been? how many years since he did that to me? how many years since i've been wanting to fight him, since i've been feeling that rock in my god-damned stomach? i managed to hide my face from him in the store so he didn't see me as he walked out. when i saw he was gone, i wondered why i still felt the pressure in my chest. i thought the pressure was going to turn my body inside-out. i reached for my heart, grabbed at my shirt. maybe the pain was always there, right there, by my heart, but i try not to think of it until i go through times like those.

Coslow's

I am back
at my old college
hang-out

years later

sharing some beers
with an old friend

then i remember
being there
with a friend
who used to
work there

she told me about the
women's bathroom

in all my years
I had never
been there

she said
women write on the wall
at the left
of the stall
women write
that they've been raped

they name names

there were arrows
pointing
to other women's
messages
saying
"i've heard this before"

first names
last names

when she told me
of this
years ago
i walked in
read the names
and wrote down one
of my own

i forgot about that wall
until now
and i am back
just yards away
from the
bathroom door

i get up
walk
open the door
years later

all the names are still there
jake jay josh larry matt scott

i can even still see
my own writing
it didn't take long
to find it

stalker

And she got out of her car, walked across her driveway, and walked up the stairs to her porch, trying to enjoy her **solitude**, trying not to remember that **he followed her** once again. She thought she was free of him; she thought he moved on with his life and that she would not have to see his face again.

Why did he have to call her, on this one particular day, years later, while she was at work? Maybe if she could have been **suspecting** it, she might have been braced for it. But then again, **shed idn'twa ntt ot hinka boutit**; she was happy that she was finally starting to feel as if she had **control** of her life again.

It had been so many years, why would she have expected him to **follow her** again? Didn't she make it clear years ago that **she didn't want him** waiting outside her house in his car anymore, that she didn't want to receive the **hang-up calls at three in the morning** anymore? Or the calls in the middle of the night, when he'd stay on the line, when she could tell that he was high, and he'd profess his love to her? Or the **letters, or the threats?** No, the police **couldn't do anything** until he took action, when it was too late. **Why did he come back?** Why couldn't he **leave her alone?** Why couldn't it be illegal for someone to **fill her with fear** for years, to make her dread being in her house **alone**, to make her wonder if her feeling that she was being followed wasn't real?

All these thoughts rushed through her head as she sat on her front porch swing, opening her mail. One bill, one piece of junk mail, one survey.

It was only a phone call, she had to keep thinking to herself. **He may never call again.** She had no idea where he was even calling from. For all she knew, he could have been on the other side of the country. It was only a phone call.

And then everything started to go wrong in her mind again, the bushes around the corner of her house were **rustling a little too loud**, there were too many cars that sounded like they were **stopping near her house**. Her own breathing even scared her.

I could go into the house, she thought, but she knew that she could be filled with fear there, too. **Would the phone ring?** Would there be a **knock** on the door? Or would he even bother with a knock, would he just **break a window**, let himself in, **cut the phone lines** so she wouldn't stand a chance?

No, she knew better. She knew she had to stay outside, that she couldn't let **this fear** take a hold of her again. And so she sat.

She looked at her phone bill again.

She heard the creak of the porch swing.

She swore she heard someone else breathing.

No, she wouldn't look up from her bill, because she knew no one was there.

Then he spoke.

“Hi.”

She looked up. He was standing right at the base of her stairs, not six feet away from her.

“What are you doing on my property?”

“Oh, come on, you used to not hate me so much.” He lit a cigarette, a marlboro red, with a match. “So, why wouldn’t you take my call today?”

“Why would I? What do I have to say to you?”

“You’re really making a bigger deal out of this than it is,” he said, then took a drag. She watched the smoke come out of his mouth as he spoke. “We used to have it good.”

She got up, and walked toward him. She was surprised; in her own mind she never thought she’d actually be able to walk closer to him, she always thought she’d be **running away**. She stood at the top of the stairs.

“Can I have a smoke?”

“Sure,” he said, and he reached up to hand her the fire stick. She reached out for the matches.

“I’ll light it.”

She put the match to the end of the paper and leaves, watched it turn orange. **She didn’t want** this cigarette. She needed to **look more calm**.
Calm. Be calm.

She remained at the top of the stairs, and he stood only six stairs below her. She sat at the top stair.

“You really think we ever got along?”

“Sure. I mean, I don’t know how you got in your head -”

“Do you think I enjoyed finding your car outside my house all the time? Did I enjoy seeing you at the same bars I was at, **watching me** and my friends, like you were **recording their faces into your memory forever?** Do you think I liked you coming to **bother me** when I was working at the store? Do you -”

“I was.”

She paused. “You were what?”

“I was logging everyone **you were with** into my head.”

She sat silent.

“At the bars - I remember every face. **I remember every one of them.** I had to, you see, I had to know **who was trying to take you away.** I needed to know who they were.”

She sat still, she couldn’t blink, she stared at him, it was just as she was afraid it would be.

And all these years **she begged him to stop,** but nothing changed.

She couldn’t take it all anymore.

She put out her right hand, not knowing exactly what she’d do if she held his hand. He put his left hand in hers.

“You know,” she said, then paused for a drag of the **red fire,** “This state would consider what you did to me years ago **stalking.**”

She held his hand tighter, holding his fingers together. She could feel her lungs moving her up and down. He didn't even hear her; he was **fixated** on looking at his hand in hers, until she caught his eyes with her own and then they stared, past the iris, the pupil, until they **burned holes** into each other's heads with their stare.

“And you know,” she said, as she lifted her cigarette, **“I do too.”**

Then she quickly moved the cigarette toward their hands together, and put it out in the top of his hand.

He **screamed**. Grabbed his hand. Bent over. Pressed harder. Swore. Yelled.

She stood. Her voice suddenly changed.

“Now, I'm going to say this once, and **I won't say it again**. I want you off my property. I want you **out of my life**. I swear to God, if you come within fifty feet of me or anything related to me or anything the belongs to me, I'll get a court order, **I'll get a gun**, I'll do **whatever it takes** to keep you away forever.”

“Now go.”

He held his left hand with his right, the fingers on his right hand purple from the pressure he was using on the open sore. He moaned while she spoke. She stood at the top of the stairs looking down on him. He slowly walked away.

She thought for a moment she had truly taken her life back. She looked down. Clenched in the fist in her left hand was the cigarette she just put out.

(the stories of women)

janet kuypers

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