

hope chest in the attic



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thirteen years of poetry, prose and artwork
by janet kuypers

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published in May, 1993
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Fred Whitehead, Editor, Freethought History: "Hope Chest in the Attic: A Collection of Thirteen Years of Poetry, Prose and Art Work"... (has) a remarkable preface defending concreteness in writing. The poems themselves deal with harsh, even terrifying topics of rape, abuse, family turmoil, alcoholism and depression. Janet Kuypers has not only written poetry about this, but has volunteered for campus rape education activities, including rallies, etc. One poem, "children, churches and daddies," relates how the poet attended a wedding in central Illinois; when the children go to the altar for communion, "little soldiers in a little line," she stays seated, making clear that religious belief is not an option for her. It's easy, isn't it, to just get up and go and pretend acceptance; sometimes doing nothing is courageous.

Bob Z, Panic Button Press, Sacramento CA: I don't usually like poetry. But I found (Ms. Kuypers') style interesting, liked the images in "wedding lost" and the believability of "farmer" - I get the feeling she knows her subjects well, and has a lot to say. She writes with strong feeling and passion, inspired dropper of verbal bombs.

Carlton Press, New York, NY : "Hope Chest in the Attic" is a collection of well-fashioned, elegant poems and prose that deals in many instances, with the most mysterious and awesome of human experiences: love... Janet Kuypers draws from a vast range of experiences and transforms thoughts into lyrical and succinct verse... Recommended as poetic fare that will titillate the palate in its imagery and imaginative creations.

Dorrance Publishing Co., Pittsburgh, PA: "Hope Chest in the Attic" captures the complexity of human nature and reveals startling yet profound discernments about the travesties that surge through the course of life. This collection reflects sensitivity toward feminist issues concerning abuse, sexism and equality. It also probes the emotional torrent people may experience as a reaction to the delicate topics of death, love and family. "Chain Smoking" depicts the emotional distress afflicted a friend while he struggled to clarify his sexual ambiguity. Not only does this thought-provoking profile address the plight homosexuals face in a homophobic society, it also characterizes the essence of friendship. "The room of the rape" is a passionate representation of the suffering rape victims experience. Vivid descriptions, rich symbolism, and candid expressions paint a shocking portrait of victory over the gripping fear.

Fithian Press, Santa Barbara, CA: Indeed, there's a healthy balance here between wit and dark vision, romance and reality, just as there's a good balance between words and graphics. The work shows brave self-exploration, and serves as a reminder of mortality and the fragile beauty of friendship.

They Won't Stay Dead, Book Reviews: Janet rules. Period. Generally, "Poetry" bores me, but more often than not, "ignores" me, but not Janet's. There's so many feelings and emotional heartache in her works, that many of her pieces can still moisten my eyes and heave my chest even after umpteenth readings. Sometimes raw, sometimes polished, sometimes shocking in its honesty, and always moving, Janet's writing continually manages to wring some sort of reaction from the reader. One can almost see the tears dripped on the manuscripts, nakedly displayed for all who care to see, be it her tears, or yours. It's packed with human feelings, much of which concerns feminist issues, but don't let that put you off. This is not Riot Girl ranting, but rather the fears and feelings of a highly intelligent, articulate and talented modern woman. Very emotional, very readable and very recommended. An absolute must for poetry/prose enthusiasts.

“addict.”

i was sitting in the front seat of lisa’s car, i can’t remember if it was a rental or her dad’s car. my face and chest were sunburnt, i could feel the top layer of my skin burning. i was wearing a peach shirt with a mini-skirt; i remember that i always had to dress up when i was with her, men always thought she was prettier. i was sitting in the front seat, it was night, lisa was driving, she just finished putting on her burgundy lipstick with her rear-view mirror and she lit a virginia slims menthol with the car lighter. my father always hated her. we parked in front of some strip store, probably off davis boulevard, and david was getting out the back so he could buy a pack of cigarettes, too. marlboro lights. they were the closest thing to those french canadian things he smoked. the ones where the box held two rows of ten instead of two of seven and one of six. the ones that were shorter than marlboros. when he got out of the car, i asked lisa what was wrong with david.

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he usually loved any opportunity to get out of the mobile home park. but the whole car ride he barely spoke. so lisa said that david was going through withdrawal, that he had no cocaine this vacation and he’s got the shakes or something. i don’t know if it was the shakes; whatever you get when you stop taking coke, that was happening to him. and i was mad because he never told me, and i was mad because he was fucked up from the stuff in the first place. and i had to act like i knew nothing when he got back in the car.

a letter

I was looking through some old photographs of mine the other night, and I came across a photo of you. A snapshot, by the pool in Florida. Years ago. Those were the days when you thought you were cool, when another gang broke your ribs, when the cops chased you down the street for trying to steal a car. They caught you because you slipped in your two hundred dollar boots. You had to sell your stereo to pay your lawyer.

And things do change. You wanted to go back to school, you worked full time, you kept away from the drugs. And your back hurt all the time, you felt too old, you wanted to start over again.

I still remember that photograph. I was dating you then, but you never told me you had another girlfriend. She wrote me a month later, telling me you were engaged.

It's funny to see that I lasted longer than her, that I still have a hold over you.

Did you ever give her an engagement ring? Was it an emerald, too?

I remember once, in the hall, after you took a drag from your cigarette, leaned over the pool table and made your shot, you told me that you would do anything for me. I asked if you'd give me the diamond earring in your ear. You remember the one, the one a married thirty-five year old woman gave you when you were sleeping with her. Yeah, that one. And you told me that if I needed it, you'd sell it and give me the money.

Christ, the pool table, and the pool cue that was your grandfather's that you got after he died. You loved him, and he wasn't even related to you, your step mother's dad. But you never liked your family.

You never liked anyone, unless it was convenient. You never liked anyone, unless you weren't alone.

Someone told me last spring that they heard you say, "Have you ever decided that you wanted something so much, but you knew you could never have it?"

They thought you were talking about me. I think you were, too.

Yes, it was nice to see a change, it was nice to see you sitting in the mornings with your coffee and your cigarette drawing in your book, creating. You have potential, you've got a genius inside you that's been beaten up by too many gangs, screamed at too many times by your family, hardened by too many pains, hurt by too many insane nights.

You once knew a pharmacist, one who liked to steal stuff and mix it with anything else he could find. You befriended him quickly. You think I don't know these things, but I do. You think I don't know you, but I do.

You used to always tell me I was the only person that knew you. You wanted someone to talk to, and you wanted it to be me.

And then we'd argue, and you'd get defensive, and the first thing out of your mouth would be, "You don't know me. You don't know anything about me."

Don't try to separate yourself from me. You can't do it.

It's not love. You should know that by now. It's two people, from two different countries, from two different worlds, who can read each other's minds.

Less than a week after you stormed out of the bar, someone came up to me and asked, "Why are you still wearing his emerald ring?"

I shouldn't have to explain. They might not understand, but you do.

When you stormed out of the bar a few months ago, I didn't think you were leaving town. But you were gone. Damn, you're such a hot head. But I know you. A few months will pass, maybe a year, and you will call again. You will say you want to be friends. But it's more than that.

It's like we're connected. It just feels different when we're in the same room together.

And when you can't stand it anymore, when you need that feeling again, you'll call.



a life goes by

1978. Mom and Dad on vacation. Sister in college. Grandma baby sitting. She taught me how to play Gin Rummy in the living room. I smudge the finish on the wood table every time I put my hand on it. We play cards for hours.

1983. Grandma is over to baby sit. Sister comes home. “Why isn’t dinner ready, Grandma?” “I didn’t know how to turn on the oven.”

She was a sly old fox, my sister said. She knew how to turn on an oven. Got out of having to make dinner. The chicken kiev was a half hour late.

1986. Spring. Friday, 4:55 p.m. Mom and Dad and Sister dressed for dinner. Dad is waiting for Mom at the door. They still had to pick up Grandma before they drove to Mike Moy’s Restaurant. Mom is checking her eye make-up in the bedroom mirror.

I stand in the doorway to her room. Are you sure you don’t want to go with us?”, she asks. I’d rather stay in the house by myself, play loud music. I was a rebellious youth. I say no. “Tell Grandma I said hi.”

1988. Sister calls. “Grandma is moving to Arizona,” she says. “She’s going to live with Aunt Rose.” She’s leaving in five days.

3 days later. I call her. I tell her I will try to visit her next summer. I tell her I will miss her. I already do miss her. She says she loves me.

I hang up, thinking that she usually doesn’t say that she loves people. She isn’t usually affectionate. I start to cry.

3 days later. I visit family. Father hugs me. He hiccups while crying.

She died this morning, they explain to me. But don’t worry about that now, we’re late for the Christmas party.

I’m in a car. Sister is driving to the family party. We are quiet. She finally speaks. “Are you okay?”, and I tell her that I will be fine. What she doesn’t realize is that I don’t say that I am fine. I look at her face. She turns her head from the road to look at me. I notice now that we really do look alike.

Something in Sister is dead. She is hiding the pain, and it is killing a piece of her. I think a part of me is dying, too.

At the party. Everyone is laughing. Brothers, sisters, nephews, a niece, an uncle. A sister-in-law says to me as she says hello, “I’m sorry.” I try to get drunk on punch.

Sister pulls out a pile of presents for the family. They are from Grandma. Jesus Christ. She died this morning. Somebody say something.

She bought me a pair of earrings.

a match

“I once set fire to my fingernail.
I wanted my finger to be a
human candle.”
She dropped another match into her glass.
The flame sizzled
in the drops of drink at the bottom.

She struck another match
at the side of the box. Kitchen matches.
Six or seven lay on the cocktail napkin,
ten more at the bottom of the glass.
In a corner booth, in this small club
the flame she aroused looked like
any other table light.
But the club was hers. She owned it
feet on the bench, knees bent.
Everything there focused on her
and the little piece of energy
she held.
Everything there was hers to abuse.
And she struck another match.

“An old flame used to say
that everyone is a pyro at heart.”
And she blushed.

“Yeah, I set my
fingernail on fire
as I was talking to someone.
It was a fake nail. The burning
plastic smelled.
But I didn’t realize what I had done
until I felt the heat on my skin.”

Just then you could see the flame
dancing at her fingertip.
She shook the match. She dropped it in her
glass.

A Microcosm of Society

No one appeared in the back half of the courtroom. Thoughts raced through Steven Kohl's mind as his eyes darted across the room. How did this happen? Was he really to blame? Will the jury members decide whether there is enough evidence against him to warrant a trial? Why are there cuts on his hands? Why can't he remember the last three weeks of his life?

Steve thought he might wake up soon, and discover that none of this had ever happened. That he wasn't trying to defend himself. That Erica wasn't dead.

He shifted in his chair. The wet cotton of his shirt collar burned against his neck. Like the branches of the trees in the ravine where Erica was found, the wool of his suit scratched his legs, his hands. He wanted to wipe the sweat from his forehead, but he was afraid that he would seem too nervous to the jury if he moved. He wanted to run out of the courtroom, stand in the February snow and feel his tears freeze as they rolled down his face.

He looked over at the papers in front of his lawyer. The names Stonum, Smith and Manchester embossed the top of the page. Steve couldn't bring himself to look at Stonum's face.

Stonum's face was chiseled and sharp. There was no room for emotion, unless closing remarks in a case called for a strong emotional appeal. The same thought kept going through Stonum's head: this boy couldn't remember who he was, much less where he was, for the last three weeks of his life. When Stonum suggested that Steve go to Dr. Litmann for a psychological examination, Steve broke down. He told Stonum that his cocaine use became daily about six weeks ago, and he started mixing drugs shortly before he lost his memory.

It was the beginning of the fourth day. The prosecutor stood.

"I would like to call to the stand a Miss Kathleen O'Connor."

Stonum jumped. "We have testimony from a Doctor Litmann, with whom she has been seeking therapy, that Miss O'Connor should not be able to testify in this case. I submit his report to you, your Honor, which outlines the fact that Miss O'Connor has been known to compulsively lie and that her perception of the truth is often distorted. We believe that it would be inappropriate and possibly detrimental if Miss O'Connor testified."

The testimony for the case was beginning to rely on character witnesses, and because no specific reason was mentioned for having Kathleen O'Connor testify, the judge said he would review the report and decide whether or not to allow her to testify the next day.

Kathleen looked at Doctor Litmann seated next to her, then bowed her head. Her letters to him were in a pile on his lap. She stood up, adjusted her dress and solemnly walked away.

Dr. Litmann stared at the chair where she had sat. When he gained the strength, he looked at the

letter at the top of the pile.

Dear Doctor Litmann:

I just had a session with you, and you asked me to start writing letters to a friend every day so that I could start to open myself up and understand myself more. Well, I don't have any friends. I don't know if I'll ever let you see these letters, but I'll write them to you.

You were asking me about my childhood in session today. Do all doctors ask about a person's childhood? I guess you must figure that any patient of theirs must have been abused by their father or wanted to kill their mother or something. No, I wasn't beaten, or starved, and I didn't even know what the word "incest" was until I was checking the spelling of "insect" in the dictionary.

I know, I know, I'm avoiding the subject. Open up, you said. Open up, God-damnit. Fine.

As a child I wasn't liked by other kids. I was too smart, you see, and I had been taught at an early age to respect authority. Actually, I don't think I was ever taught that, because my parents didn't seem to teach me much of anything. I just knew I had to listen to them when they yelled at me. All of my life I was afraid of my father. He never really was a father to me, for he wasn't home often, but when he was home, all he seemed to do was yell at me. I always figured that I must have done something wrong, because he was never happy with me. Hence the self-esteem problem, I guess. I think that's why I got messed up with all those other men, too, doc. But you said we'd get to that in a later session.

The thing is, they always told me that I had to act a certain way, and that I had to do all of these things, but I never knew why I had to do them. If it was to be a good person, then I wanted to know who the hell decided what was good. From what I understood, good wasn't fun. It wasn't even self-fulfilling.

But I was going to do what they wanted. I got into a good school, and decided to study in a field that I didn't like. But, you see, that would get me a job with good pay — even if I didn't like it — and would make everyone in society think that everything was good in my life. If I just went through the motions, people would think I was happy, and then they might leave me alone.

But that didn't work.

Doc, I'm tired. The medication you make me take at night really knocks me out. I'll write later.

She never signed her letters, and she always typed them so that they could never be traced to her. She made sure she covered all of her bases.

Litmann pressed his right hand over his eyes, almost in an effort to hold his face together.

Dear Doctor—

Hi. I'm back. It's night again. I like writing at night. I write at the desk in my room by two candles. I could turn on the lights, but the candles make shadows on the walls. I like the shadows. They make me think of everything out there that I'm not supposed to do.

In our session today you wanted me to tell you about the turning point of my life. You figured out that there was some sort of event in my life that made me want to rebel against all the empty values my parents tried to shove down my throat. That event was a man.

You see, he was a boyfriend of mine — a boring one that fit into my plan of having a boring future. I'd get a boring job, and I'd marry that boring man and we'd live in a boring house with boring children and act happy. I thought it would all be simple enough — I mean, the man seemed harmless and all. But he wasn't.

He went away to school with me, and at the first chance he got, he got me drunk. And he raped me.

It occurred to me then that my boring life wasn't going to happen. Doc, I thought I could just float by life, going through the motions without feeling anything, whether it be pain or happiness. The rape tore me apart inside. This man was supposed to be the security in life, and he killed any security I thought I could ever feel. I knew that what he did wasn't right, but I also knew that there was nothing I could really do about it, because society seemed to ignore things like rape. Nothing seemed right anymore.

I looked into different religions. I read the new testament, and I tried to go through the old one, but the reading was just too dry. God just seemed like a joke to me. I deduced that religion was just a means to keep the masses in their place. But it wouldn't hold me down.

I wonder why I don't tell you all of these things while I'm in session with you. Maybe it's because you're trying to make me "normal" again — normal in the eyes of society. Well, their rules don't make sense.

Dear Doc —

I can't love unconditionally.

I think everyone thinks I'm just very cold. But it's just that I can't love someone that I can't respect or admire. I don't think I love my family, because I can't respect their values, and I can't love other people because I can't trust them. That's where my value system comes in. I decided that the only person I could trust and love is myself. So my goals should be to make myself happy, right? If

I do that, what more could I want? Why should I want to please others?
And I liked having those one night stands. I liked the power I felt when I could make a man want me so much and I had the power to do with him whatever I wanted. You could say that I wanted to get back at the man who raped me, you could say that I was looking for someone to care for me the way I wanted my father to when I was a child — but I wanted the power. I wanted the control of others — and it was an emotional control, which was even stronger than a physical control. I felt an emotional high from making them weak. I don't know which high was stronger.

Dear Doc—

I'm not afraid to tell you the next part, for even if I do give you these letters, you can't tell anyone about them. I've checked into the laws, and because of the nature of the case and client confidentiality privileges, you couldn't utter a word.

Now, I never got into drugs. I drank a lot, which I guess I get from my father, but I never touched drugs. But I had ways of getting a hold of them, and cheap. So I started selling stuff to some of the college students — particularly the good looking men. If my plan was going to work, I had to pick the right kinds of people. I'd go to the men in the elite fraternity houses — the ones that you needed not only good looks, but also a lot of money and a lot of connections to get in to.

Then I found the man. Steve. Gullable bastard, isn't he? Then I found the woman. A typical bitch — bleach blond, sorority, stupid as all hell. The type that makes me look like something is wrong with me for not wearing designer clothes. I knew I could make Steve do something he normally wouldn't — and maybe this would be my little way of destroying a microcosm of the society. It's destroying Steve. And it destroyed Erica.

Litmann looked up. He pulled his glasses from his face. He didn't know if the steam on the glass was from his sweat or his tears. He got up, clenching the letters. He left the room.

age

Sometimes, when I get behind the wheel of a car, I feel like I'm at Six Flags Great America Amusement Park In Gurnee, Illinois again and I'm thirteen years old and I'm able to drive one of the bumper cars. And it's such a thrill — because, I mean, I'm thirteen years old and I can't drive, and I'm now in control of this huge piece of machinery. Granted, there's this wire sticking up from the car that gets electricity from the ceiling, but for once I feel free, that I can just go, go faster than I ever could by running, or even if I used my roller skates or my bicycle. And when I get that feeling and I'm behind the wheel of my car I want to drive really really fast out on an abandoned road, blare some rock music, roll down my window, and turn up the heat, since it's the middle of winter.

Sometimes, when I go out on a new date, I feel like I'm sixteen again, and I'll rifle through my closet, deciding I have absolutely nothing to wear. And he'll pick me up, and we'll go to a restaurant with deer heads on the walls, and we'll have whiskey sours, and we'll struggle with the lettuce leaves in the salads because they're too big, and when we're done with dinner we'll go to a bar that's so crowded and so loud that we won't be able to talk to each other, but we'll have to stand real close. And then he'll take me home and I'll invite him in, he'll sit on the chair, I'll sit on the couch, and he'll ask for a glass of water. When we can't think of any more small talk, and the clock says 3:12 a.m., I'll see him to the door, he'll kiss me good-bye, and I'll lock the door after he leaves. And when I'm sure he can't see me through the window, I'll turn on the stereo and dance in my living room before I go to bed.

Sometimes, when I'm having sex with someone, I feel like I've done this for years, like I've been married to this man for twenty years, and I still don't know him, but I'm still there, night after night. After the wedding, after the new house, which was a little small, but we'll get something bigger when we have the money, after the two kids and the fifteen pounds, after I lose my job, after we don't get that new house and after the kids complain about their curfews, after the dog dies, hell, it was only trouble for us anyway, after the sinus headaches, the back problems, that all-over sore feeling, you know, it's harder to wake up in the mornings now, after it all he still has the nights, the sex with the woman he knows all too well but not at all, and we do it, as we always do. It becomes memorization. It becomes like a play, that I act out night after night.

Sometimes, when I get home after 10 o'clock from working overtime on the computers, I just want

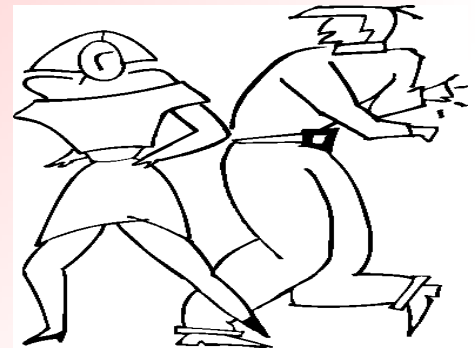
to retire, to quit the work, to stop it all. I see my parents, after a life of working at the construction site and raising five children, now beginning to relax, buying a small home in Southwest Florida, playing tennis in the morning, playing cards in the afternoon, drinking with other retired couples in the evening. Sometimes another couple invites them out for a boat ride off of Marco Island, where they smoke cigarettes, drink a few beers, and drive slow enough to make no wake when they're by the pier.

Sometimes I look at the computer screen I work at and remember how computers used to mean video games. I remember when I was eight and I would sit with my best friend in the upstairs den on the floor in front of the old television set and play table tennis on our Atari. Times change, I suppose, and I get old. This is my life.



all men have secrets

all men have secrets and here is mine.
Strength is my weakness
and now my shoulders don't stay in place.
You ask me to open my eyes
but they are. At least I think they are.
Why don't you take me in your arms?
Why don't you seduce me?
Tear me in half. Rip me apart.
Just don't cast me aside.
I don't want to be strong. Be strong
for me, so that I can adjust my chin
and not have to worry about
whether or not my eyes are open.



amber beads

As the flames engulfed
my worldly possessions
my everything
seemed to disappear.
But I did not cry
for the loss of the money -
I cried for the
photographs,
and the poems, and the amber beads.

I love you, mother,
and I love the mother
who died while I
rested in your womb.
Sandy tells me stories
of visiting Grandma
and eating pickles.
And I remember
every spring,
every Mother's Day,
you would diligently
plant flowers
around the
Bakutis name.
I have learned
to love her
without ever seeing
her face.

Joseph tells me
that I seem like
my mother
and I only pray to God
that he's right.
For then my existence
would keep the love
and the caring alive
in a kind of living
that no strike of a match
that no burning building
that no mere mortal
could destroy.

brewing the coffee and remembering summer

I pulled the bag of coffee beans
from the refrigerator door.
I could already smell the aroma of the flavored coffee:
this time I picked Bewitching Brandy.
I loved the smell.
I treated myself to these flavored coffees
at only special occasions.
I closed my eyes and inhaled,
filling my lungs,
intoxicating myself with the bouquet.
I hadn't even opened the bag.

I walked over to my coffee pot,
the one that makes just one cup.
I set the white bag down on the counter
and opened the top of the bag.
I reached over, grabbed a spoon,
pushed it into the coffee grounds
and dropped a spoonful
into the bottom of the pot.
The glass pot was a little wet on the inside,
and some of the grounds
stuck to the sides of the glass
before they could fall to the bottom.

I then took the boiling water
and poured it into the pot,
put the lid on it,
and set it down to let it brew.
I sat down at the table
and watched the steam rise
from out of the spout.
The steam poured out,





like it was trying to get away,
as fast as it could.
It looked violently hot.

I then remembered summer.
I would have flavored coffee at work
over the summer.
Work was my haven,
my home away from home.
My home away from him.

I brought some coffee beans home
for my mother once.
A week later, while eating dinner with my parents,
mother thanked me for the beans.
Father, after eating in silence,
finally said he didn't like them.
"I don't know why you had to change.
I liked it the way it was."

I couldn't believe they started to argue
over coffee beans.
Mother vowed to it like a religion;
father discounted it like one.
It all seemed so silly
and senseless,
so I finally spoke up.
"I was only trying to be nice"

chain smoking

He had been acting strangely for oh, the last six months or so, but I never thought much of it. He was the type of friend who was always doing everything — he held two jobs, was a full time student double majoring in pre-med and Russian, he was in a fraternity house and was also involved with Air Force R.O.T.C. And he still managed to find time to go out on the weekends and flirt with every girl he met. He even hit on me three and a half years ago, while we were still mere acquaintances and not the closest of friends.

But he had been acting strangely, not calling me as much, not visiting or going out. After about a month or two of this he came over one night at about midnight and started complaining to me about the stress in his life. Then he started to chain smoke, the man who never smoked before, the man who was studying to go to med school, the man who wanted to be in tip-top shape for the Air Force. It made no sense. It was two o'clock in the morning, and he was still complaining to me, he was still wide awake, and he still looked like he needed something to hit.

I had told him before that he did too much with his life and that one day it would all catch up with him. I figured that's what was happening now.

Every time I saw him after that he was the same way — irritable, chain smoking, telling me about how he's not sleeping a lot and how he's failing his classes. His girlfriend was studying in Russia for the semester. He flirted some without her around, but he didn't cheat on her. But he didn't miss her.

Recently a group of black guys beat him up on the street one night. They picked him out of a crowd and punched him in the face, the doctors figured the assailant had something in his hand, brass knuckles, a roll of quarters, for he made a clean break in his jaw. He had his mouth wired shut for six weeks. I thought maybe this was part of the reason he was on edge, sucking food through a straw for over a month has to be a pain in the ass. But his behavior changed before the accident. And he still chain smoked through the wires in his mouth.

I figured that it must be because of his family that he was the way he was. His father was a high ranking official in the Air Force, they travelled around constantly, his father was always succeeding, always being the stern perfectionist. He wasn't like that. He wasn't stern. He was sweet, and fun.

And now look, He's probably giving himself ulcers, if not lung cancer.

So I finally got back into town and I decided that I had to get this all figured out. The latest I heard was that he was getting back to religion and thinking of talking to his pastor for advice on some of his problems. It sounded like a cop-out to me, I mean, religion wouldn't give him the answers he

needed but the answers they wanted him to have, so I was thinking that if he really needed help he should go talk to a counselor. He gets counseling services free through the student clinic. Oh, shit, I don't even really know what's wrong with him, I've got to try to talk to him, I hope he opens up to me, we've been friends for too long.

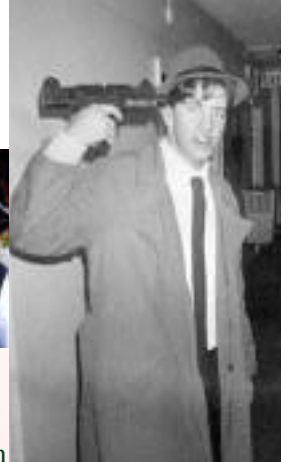
So I asked him to stop by and he came over to my place and he knew very well that I wanted the truth out of him. What was the stress from? Why did he just break up with his girlfriend less than a week after they were looking at engagement rings, why is he chain smoking, is the Air Force doing this to him, does he really need the money from his two jobs?

So he comes in, sits down on the couch next to me, and tells me that he's been coming to terms with the fact that he thinks he's gay. Or at least bi, he's not sure, everything's so confusing. What would the fraternity house say? What would the Air Force say, other than good-bye, and most importantly, what would his parents say? What would the world say?

Okay, so I was shocked, but this wasn't the time to show it. I gave him a hug, let him talk for a while, told him I was there for him. I suggested thinking about counseling. Then we went to a sub shop and had lunch, tried to get our minds off these things.

And we're at the counter of this sub shop and we're making cracks about a six inch versus a twelve inch sub. He told me I was ordering the six inch because I never had him. Fuck, he's doing it again, being his same old self, flirting with women that are friends, and I can take it in good fun and all, but this just seems a little too strange. So then I start thinking, okay, does he make these kinds of cracks to other men? Is he attracted to everything that walks down the god damn street? So then we're eating our subs and we're sharing the same drink and I start thinking, should I be doing this? Is this safe?, and I still take another drink and try not to think about it. And then he says, "My problem is that I'm horny all the time." Then he tells me about his boyfriend Brandon and from then on nothing seemed real anymore. I had to ask if the gold necklace he was wearing was Brandon's, it's not his style to wear necklaces. It was. He was even borrowing the guy's car. So I tell him to call me, and I tell him I'll help him look for a counselor if it will help him deal with the issue, and I tell him he can talk to me anytime. And I get out of Brandon's car and walk back to my place.

And then I just start thinking. This is the man who hit on me at a rock concert we went to three years ago by running his tongue up and down my face. This was the man that I visited on the east coast, we had a romantic dinner in a private room in the Air Force dining hall. We toured Salem, Massachusetts and took pictures posing in the witch racks they have on the sidewalks for tourists. We shopped in Maine and bought glassware and Christmas ornaments together. We went to fraternity dances, I was his date, hey, we even went to a military ball together. This is the man who would sit with me in my window sill, feet hanging out the second story, drinking fuzzy navels with me and singing rap songs. This is the man who was my roommate for a few months, we'd go to the local fitness center together and exercise, he'd be on the bicycles, I'd be on the rowing



machine.

This was the man who sat with me one night in my apartment, like we were two kids in high school, and we wrote lists of all the people we made out with. His list of women was relatively short, but I didn't think much of it. He told me at the sub shop that his list of men was longer than mine.

This was the man I went to happy hours with every Friday afternoon. He carried me home once because I didn't eat that day and the beer went straight to my head. He called me spaghetti legs from then on because I lost all muscle control in the lower half of my body and couldn't walk. He carried me home and put me to bed.

Another day at another happy hour when we were both depressed because we thought we'd never find someone to marry he told me that if we were both single when we were forty, we'd get married. It was our little joke from then on to say that we were engaged.

I had a dream a couple of weeks before he told me this that he told me he had AIDS from a blood transfusion. The news tore me apart, my close friend, this couldn't be happening to you, I just can't believe it, it must be a mistake, anyone but you. I told him I'd be there for him, I wasn't afraid to hug him, I wasn't afraid to kiss him. And in the dream I wanted to marry him then and there, just so he didn't die alone.



children, churches, and daddies

And the little girl said to me,
“I thought only daddies drank
beer.” And I found myself

trying to make excuses for the can
in my hand. I remember being
in the church, a guest at a

wedding of two people
I didn’t know. My date pointed
out two little boys

walking to their seats in
front of us. In little suits and
cowboy boots, this is what

is central Illinois. And my date
said he was sure those boys
would grow up to be gay. And

the worst part was their father
was the coach of the high school
football team. I think I

laughed, but I hesitated.
I remember being in the
church, it was Christmas

Eve, my date’s family went up

for communion, and all I could think
was that singing the hymns was

hard enough, I don’t know the
words, what am I doing here,
what am I supposed to do? And I

stayed seated, and everyone else
slowly walked to the front of the
church. Little soldiers in a

little line, the little children
in their little dresses walking
behind their mommies and

daddies. And the little girl
said, “I thought only daddies
drank beer.” And I found myself

trying to make excuses.

Christmas at the old house

God, I remember the tree. Before my parents moved, when I was just a little kid, we used to have Christmas in the old house in Chicago. All of the brothers and sisters would come over, and on Christmas Eve we would sit around the tree in the front room. The tree looked so tall; it looked so powerful to me. It looked monstrous. Almost like an evergreen, it was green with a just a hint of blue to it — and it seemed to glitter just standing there all by itself. We would put all sorts of lights on the tree and we had all of these old silk spun beaded ornaments that my sisters made when they were little decorating the tree. We put the tree right in front of a huge window in the front of the house. During Christmas we could always see the snow falling. And the presents were everywhere. We all bought gifts for each other — and with five children, a brother in-law, a sister in-law, parents and grandparents, there always ended up being a ton of presents. I was the youngest, and the only one that was still really a child. I knew most of the gifts were for me. As everyone would get up from dinner to open the presents, I would rush to the front room and slide until I fell on the beige carpeting. We never used the front room, so the carpeting always looked new. It even smelled new. I was always the first in the room and I could never understand what on earth took everyone else in my family so incredibly long to get to the Christmas tree. Once my mother handed a present to me to open. I fiercely ripped open the packaging, and I found a hand held electronic math game. It said “Digits” across the front in strange orange and red colors, like a bad set of curtains from another decade. I didn’t know what to think. I had no idea what it was. I didn’t even know what the word “digits” meant. But it was electronic, and it was a present, so I was excited.

As all of this was registering in my head, someone asked me what I just opened. I told them I got a game. “Dig-its!!!” I exclaimed, making it sound like it was a game about shoveling the most dirt or something. Everyone started laughing. I had no idea what they were laughing about.

Clay

so I was at this bar, on the coast of florida — the west coast, the gulf side, you know. it was this place called lana kai, and my friend gave me a ride all the way from naples, which is a good forty-five minutes south of the place.

and so we were sitting there at the bar, which is half indoors and half on the beach, and all these old men kept staring at my friend's chest. a couple guys bought us beer and one guy asked me to dance. I was surprised he asked me to dance, and not my friend — men were usually more attracted to her.

but the guys were jerks anyway — one looked like a marine with that haircut and must have been high on something, one looked like he decided to forgo hygiene, another was twice my age. it's not as if I try to pick up men in bars anyway.

so after a while I couldn't stand being at the bar, next to the reggae band that was playing (I never really liked reggae music anyway, I mean, it's too slow to dance to), so I begged my friend to come walk with me on the beach.

christ, I felt like a ten-year-old with a bucket and shovel when I kicked off my black suede shoes and ran into the water. I always loved the feel of sand when it's drenched in water. it feels like clay as it seeps around my toes, pulling me into the ground.

so there I was, splashing in the water, wearing a black sequin dress, throwing my purse to the shore, taking a swig from my can of miller lite. this was life, I thought. pure and simple. an army couldn't have dragged me out of the water.

so my friend found some guy to hit on, as she usually does, and she wanted me to hit on his friend. I found him ugly as all sin, and impossible to talk to. I told him that one of the rafts on the shore was mine, and instead of driving to the bar I sailed. and he believed me. I told my friend flat out that I wouldn't go with him. she was pissed that I didn't find him good-looking.

so then He strolled up from the bar to the beach, an intriguing stranger, and He walked up right next to me in the water, still wearing his shoes, seeming to know that I needed to be saved. as most knights in shining armor would.

and He said hello to me, and He started talking to me, and He cracked a few jokes, and He made me laugh.

and okay, I'll admit it — he was good-looking, really good looking. I remember at one point, looking at him made me think of a greek statue, He had this curly hair, this sharp chin, these strong cheek bones. but those greek statues could never talk to me, they have no color, they don't come alive. they're made of stone.

His name was Clay. and when we talked He crept into my pores, the way the sand made it's way between my toes. His voice tunneled into me, boring me hollow, making me anxiously wait to be filled with more and more of His words.

my friend disappeared with her new-found monosyllabic lover, for hours, until long after the bar closed, leaving me stranded. there I was, forty-five miles north of my home at 2:20 in the morning with no means of transportation. it could have been worse, I could have been somewhere other than on the beach, I could have been sober, and I might not have had a knight in shining armor named Clay to save me.

and as He drove me home (an hour and a half out of his way), I couldn't help but run my fingers through his hair, it was an uncontrollable impulse, like the urge to drag your fingers deep into the wet sand. I told Him I was just trying to keep Him awake for the drive.

it's almost better if I never see Him again. then I can always think of Him this way.

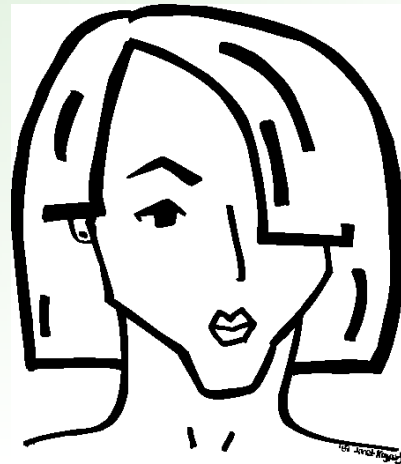


confident women

I met up with an old friend of mine for drinks last week. I knew her in high school, although we weren't close friends then. In those days she needed therapy, had problems with drugs, I think, or else it was just family problems. I was a bit insecure myself, shy, meek, scared of life. Since those days we matured, we're now more independent, self-confident, self-assured women.

It was good to see her again. She just came back from camping in Australia; although physically I had gone nowhere, we both had our stories to tell over a bottle or two of wine. And we gossiped, she told me of the handsome Australian man she fell for, I told her of the roller-coaster I call my romantic life. And we laughed. And then the gossip changed, her voice lowered, and sounding stern but quiet, she told me of how a man broke into her apartment one night last summer and he tried to rape her, and after kicking and screaming in her underwear she managed to break free and her attacker escaped. She told me they found the man, and the trial is scheduled for later in the month. And she sat there, with her wine glass in her hand, looking so confident, as if she knew she won this battle. Trying not to sound

corny, I told her I could give her a hug. And she leaned on my shoulder, and she cried, hiccuping as she tried to catch her breath. They would make her recount everything on the stand, she said, and the defense lawyers would try to make her sound promiscuous because she slept alone in her underwear. I told her I would go with her to the trial. I told her she is winning by speaking out. Self-assured women. Confident women. How confident are we supposed to be?



coquinas

1

I can't imagine
the number of times
I've been there

visiting Florida,
Christmas with my parents
a plastic tree
decorated
with sand dollars
and red

ribbons

eating Christmas dinner
listening to Johnny Mathis

and after the Irish coffee,
father with his brandy snifter
in hand

mother and the other
girls
putting away the dishes

the carolers would come,
walking in front of our home

singing "We wish you a
merry Christmas"
over and over again

we would walk outside

and the cool breeze
almost felt like Christmas
after the hot
humid days

and we would stand on our driveway
smile and nod

you could see down the road
all the candles in
paper bags
lining the street

and for a few lights
the bag

burned

2

and we would take
boat rides
off the coast
my parents and their friends
to a tiny island

dad drinking beer
sometimes steering the boat
control
the women sitting together in the shade
worrying about their hair

i would sit at the front
sunglasses, swimsuit and sunburn
feeling the wind
slapping me
in the face

and turning my head away from the boat
into the wind
away from them

to face it again

docking at a shoreline
everyone jumping out
little bags in their hands

the women go looking for shells
the men go barbecue

after an hour or two
the sandwiches, potato chips eaten
the soda and beer almost
gone

we turn around
and head back

we have conquered

3

and I remember
the coquinas

the little shells
you could find them alive
on the beaches north of the pier in
Naples

going to the beach
I would look for a spot
to find them

they were all my own

they burrowed their way into the
sand
to avoid the light
worming their way away from me

I unearthed a group of coquinas once,
fascinated with their color of
their shells, the way
they moved

before they could hide

I collected them
in a jar,
took them home with me

what did you teach me
what have you taught me to do
is this it
is this what it has become
is this what has become of me
of you of us

and I took them home

I added salt water and sand
but I couldn't feed them
I realized soon that they
would die

so I let them

daisy

Every time he invited me over, we'd open the door and there would be that ankle-biting dog barking it's head off. If she was human, I'd say she was screaming bloody murder, but she's a dog, and "barking bloody murder" doesn't sound right. Besides, she doesn't really bark. She yaps.

She's one of those dogs that yaps at everything. We'd always hear her, even before we'd get inside the door. It's the kind of bark that makes you want to drop-kick her across the room.

"Yipyipyipyip!!!Yapyapyapyap!!!"

Her bark reminds me of Dino from the Flintstones. It's a contrived bark, and it's annoying as Hell. It's a bark that doesn't quite sound like a dog.

Her name is Daisy, but she doesn't connote any of those images of happiness and simplicity a daisy creates. I think any notions of happiness would be too annoyed with her bark to stick around, anyway.

She's a Chihuahua, which makes her look like a fat tan dachshund with big ears. She's no longer than eighteen inches, but I think she thinks of herself as a Doberman protecting her territory. She growls at passing traffic, snaps at an outstretched hand and yaps at a stranger's voice.

"Don't talk until she sniffs you," he'd always say. "Let her get acquainted with you." Wondering what the appropriate waiting time was for Daisy to get acquainted with someone, I'd get tired of the conversation being stifled and would eventually whisper something to him. Daisy would then immediately start yapping with all the fierceness an eighteen inch Chihuahua could muster up. The conversation would be halted for another five minutes until she was finished with her canine tantrum.

Suddenly I thought of my sister. She always had to have her way, too. And my sister's voice is almost as annoying as that damn yapping noise.

But this time while I was over he told me said he had to run to the store, so he asked me to stay and "keep Daisy company." As I stood in the window and watched his fire-engine red Hyundai Scoupe drive him away, Daisy jumped on the back of the couch, poised toward the window. She

yapped bloody murder.

I sat down in a chair. Daisy sat in the adjacent couch, probably choosing her seat so she'd have a view of the passing traffic she could yap at if she so chose. She stretched out on the couch like a queen, amongst pillows that were bigger than her bed. I thought of my sister again.

She then turned her eyes toward me and squinted, as if to say, “ha ha, bitch, I’ve got the couch and you have to sit in a chair.”

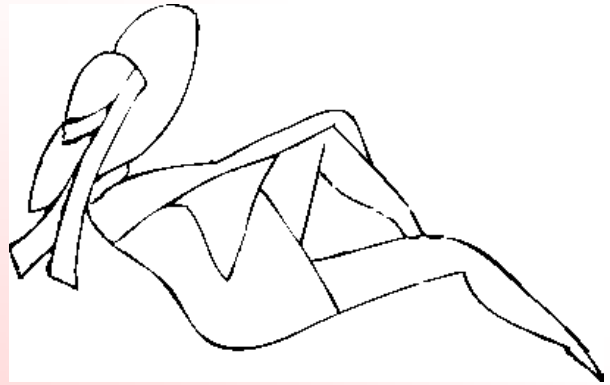
She put her head down and closed her eyes. I couldn’t help but wonder what it would be like to be her — to have a couch as big as the living room to crawl on to, to have nothing to worry about but the passing traffic.

A car turned down the street and started driving toward the house. Daisy picked her head up, looked out the window and started to growl. I attempted to show an ounce of authority to the dog: “Day-zeee,” I said, as if I were actually about to reprimand the thing. She stopped growling and turned her head half way toward me, pausing just for a moment before she turned back and continued to growl at the Buick.

I couldn’t see her face, but I’m sure it had a look on it that said, “You bitch, how dare you yell at me... Who are you anyway??”

She couldn’t even bother to turn her head around entirely to look at me.

I just sat there, looking at Queen Daisy in all her glory. I sat back in the chair and tried to relax. I twisted the ring on my finger. I looked out the window and waited for him to come home.



dandelions for a passing stranger

I loved my silly red tricycle, the type that every suburban three year old probably had. I would play on my driveway, riding past the evergreens, past the white mailbox... But I'd usually turn around before I rode past the gravel and onto the neighbor's driveway and ride back toward the security of my own garage. I would sometimes play on the neighbor's driveway, since it was on a hill. I would scale to the top by their maroon colored garage, navigate my trusted tricycle around by its rusted handlebars, hop on the seat and zoom downhill. But those times were only for when I thought no one was home at their house, and for when I was feeling particularly adventurous. Once I was riding up and down my own driveway and I saw another little girl walking on the neighbor's yard. I watched her approach my driveway, walking on the edge of our lawn. I was fascinated by this girl. There was a new face to look at — a girl with long blonde hair, so different from my own. She came from the lawn behind my house and was walking along the side of my driveway, away from my home. I just watched her walk. When she passed me, I looked over to the neighbor's yard. Our lawn was full of green grass. Theirs was full of dandelions. I rode over to the side of my driveway, got off my tricycle, hopped over the ledge and ran onto the neighbor's lawn. I picked a dandelion.

I quickly ran back to my tricycle. It patiently waited there, just where I left it... I pedaled fiercely to the end of my driveway, and caught up with that little girl. Still sitting on my tricycle, I looked up at her until she stopped walking right in front of me. I held up the dandelion to her.

david



When I know you're not going out anywhere in the morning,
I get dressed, brew some flavored coffee, put it
in a thermos, and bring my book
to that hut on the corner of San Lu Rue Avenue.
The coffee tastes good when the Florida air
is just chilly enough to open your eyes.
I sit there, and I write, usually about
you, and I wait.
I know you're a late riser, but
within a half hour you're there.
Empty mug in one hand, drawing book and pencils
in the other. Cigarettes in pocket.
You look tired. But I'm awake.

I used to fear for your life, you know, when you were messed up with the drugs, the gangs. I'd sit
up nights wondering why you didn't call. I'd wonder if you were dead. I'd wonder if you were
beaten up, bleeding on a subway, trying to hold your ribs in place. It hurt to care from five hundred
miles away, for someone who couldn't care for himself.
I'm glad that you straightened yourself out. Or I'm glad you almost did.

I remember being in your car, driving back from Tiger Tail beach. My skin felt itchy from the salt.
My feet were sticking out the window, pressed against the rear-view mirror. I think you were
holding my hand.

This was after you told me you wanted me to marry you. You never asked me to marry you, but
you told me that's what you wanted. I should have expected that from you. But you always
surprised me.

I remember thinking that we could never get along for any reasonable length of time. You didn't
want to leave Canada; I didn't want to leave the States. You wanted to backpack around Europe; I
wanted to get a job, an apartment, some security. Vacationing at the tip of this peninsula seemed
to be the only way we could meet.

But even though my skin hissed from the salt and the sun, in that car with you I felt like we could
go anywhere.



I looked in my purse today
and found a box of Swan Vestas matches. You bought them
at the tobacco shop in the mall in Naples.
You asked me to hold the box for you.
I couldn't understand why you bothered to buy matches
when you could get matchbooks anywhere, but
I must admit that you looked good when you lit one of them.
The box was so big. No American would want
a matchbox that big.
You always struck the match to the box three times
before it would light.
You made the art of lighting a match
seem like a pleasure.

I always liked the smell of sulphur.
I'm glad you forgot that box in my purse.



desirous

the light from you
the flames leap up
licking my lips
touching my skin
the fire moving
in it's desirous dance
the smoke intoxicates me
as the remnants
from the desirous inferno
drum a rhythmic beat
and crackle as they burn
the ashes fall
sprinkling
tickling my face
sliding down my throat
coating my lungs
making every breath
a desirous pant
I chain myself
my body falls limp
I am entwined
with the desirous world
the desire from you

doctor

Once upon a time there was a young man who was very intelligent. You could see him at his desk now, writing, or sitting on his bed, leaning against his headboard, reading, studying. And people knew he was intelligent, and people knew he would be a doctor someday. If you got him talking, he'd tell you about starting work in the emergency room, about the people he met, about the lives he wanted to save.

And this man was also a very handsome man, he stood tall, blonde hair, bright blue eyes, eyes like water, reflected in a scalpel. He dressed well, always looked impeccable. And he had a wide, open smile. His mother never had to tell him to brush his teeth every day.

And this man was a charming man, as most would have to be to be a good doctor. He was raised well, given the best of everything, and still taught the value of work. And as you'd get to know him, you'd see that he holds open doors for you, listens intently, pays the bill, laughs at your jokes.

In fact, this man is so charming, so kind, that you'll never see him yell, never see him get angry. He never swears, never cries, never laughs too hard, never has too much fun. He's like a Ken doll. You can be mean to him, you can steal from him, you can rape him. That's part of his charm.

He was so charming. So lifelessly charming.

Just once, I wanted to be able to grab his broad shoulders and shake him, dig my fingers into his flesh, maybe break a nail, maybe bring some more pain into his life. I wanted to grab him, to shake him, to tell him that he needed to feel this pain, he needed to feel it, because without it he couldn't feel the joy, the bliss, the ecstasy of life. When he saves his first life on the operating table, when he falls in love, when his first child is born, these things will all register in his mind, he will understand these things for what they are, but otherwise they will mean nothing to him. How do I tell this charming man, this handsome man, this intelligent man, that he's not living life right? How do I explain these things, how do I explain the color blue to a blind man?

done this before

I keep looking back at your picture. I'll flip it over to stop from staring at it while I read a page from my book, but a minute won't pass before I'll have to turn the photo over again to see your face. It's as if I can't get away from it.

My flight was delayed, I'm at O'Hare Airport, the airport that departs three planes every second, or is it one plane every three seconds, oh shit, I don't remember. I have to wait at least three hours for my next flight, hey, if so many planes take off here, then why can't I get on one of them? Oh well, so I decided to waste my time in one of the airport cocktail bars, by gate L 4. I thought I'd start with a white zinfandel and work my way to mixed drinks, but this wine tastes so good that I think I might just have to have another.

I'm so exasperated, I hate to wait, and all I have is a good book to keep me company. I used your photo from my wallet as a bookmark. I need these things to keep me sane.

It really isn't bad here in the cocktail bar by gate L 4, the chairs aren't that uncomfortable, even though they're a pretty ugly shade of green that doesn't match anything in the room. It really isn't that bad, in a foreign city, in a foreign airport. Not when I've got my Sutter Home White Zinfandel. And my picture of you.

You know, there's a blonde girl dressed well with a bad perm across the bar, and she's smoking a cigarette. I know I don't smoke, but I'm almost tempted to ask her for one just so I can hold the cigarette the way you do.

I'd like to taste the tar, the nicotine, the way I taste it in your kiss. You think I don't like it, but I do.

They're playing a song in the cocktail bar, a song that reminds me of an ex. I wanted to marry that man. He had a knack of being able to envelope me, to take my troubles away.

I don't know if I can take away my troubles myself anymore. I don't know if the liquor's helping, or the cigarettes. Your photo helps, my little bookmark. At least for now it helps.

Sitting in this L 4 cocktail bar reminds me of my brother. When I was young he'd always pick us up at the airport, but if he wasn't waiting at the gate we knew to look for him at the seafood cocktail bar. A part of me expects him to come walking through the doorway now, flannel shirt, ski jacket, wind-blown greasy hair, coke-bottle glasses. You know, when I'd look at his eyes through those glasses, his eyes looked twice as big as they actually were.

I could imagine him now, I could imagine the smell of his Levi's of dirt from the construction site. I remember that smell from my father; I'd smell it every day when he came home from work. It's my brother's business now, he's got his own family now to worry about instead of a little sister. So I'll just sit here at this airport cocktail bar, remembering the days when I'd sit with him in a place like this and I was too young to drink.

God, I want to see my brother walking in to this bar at L 4, ordering a shrimp cocktail. I want to see you, babbling on about a movie you reviewed or a gig your band had. I want something that isn't so foreign, like this bar. Or maybe I want something that isn't so familiar.

I took your picture out of my wallet, the wallet that has so many pictures of men who have come and gone in my life, men who have hurt me, men who I have gone through like... like dish washing liquid, or like something I use all the time and replace all the time and don't think twice about.

I'll just sit here, in this airport, trying to care just the right amount, not too much, but not too little. So I'll just sit here, in this airport cocktail bar, looking at your photo, and wondering if I've done this before.



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.

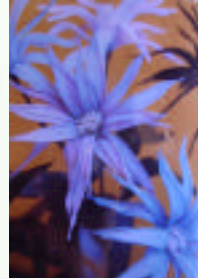
I don't know why I do it. He never sees me, and I never see him, although I thought I didn't want to see him anyway. When I first met him I wasn't afraid of him. Now I'm so afraid that I have to drive by his house every once in a while, just to remind myself of the fear. We all like the taste of fear, 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 lampshade 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.



egg drop soup

or a response to a love letter

“I think of us holding hands,
walking up the beach,
in the afternoon rays of the Grecian sun,
to a sleepy whitewash and cobblestone village...” J. Z.

I decided that I want to make you dinner someday.
Shrimp, bean sprouts, rice, teppan steak,
egg drop soup, tea...

Why?

Oh, I don't know.

I just thought you'd like it.

I don't know why that surprises you.

At work I saw a little boy, about five years old.
He had a shy look to his face,
the kind of look that tells you
that you — and only you —
are his best friend.

I told a coworker that I'll have a lot of kids one day —
“Yeah, but I'll buy 'em. I hear there's a lot of money
in the baby market.”

But inside I only hoped
that one day I'd have a baby boy
as beautiful as he.

I think about that a lot now —
the future, children —
and how one day your son will grow up
to be as wonderful a man as you.



I was with a friend today
as she was holding her one month old baby.
It's amazing how maternal we women get,
but when she asked me if I wanted to hold the baby
a surge of joy,
a belief that something so wonderful
couldn't be happening to me,
and a shock that the mother
trusted me with her child
went through me.
And when I held the new life in my arms,
when I held up his head in the palm of my hands,
the thought that one day this may be mine
moved me to the point of tears.
Holding that baby helped me understand
that it's not just that my life is getting better,
and coming together,
but that one day all of the pieces
will fall into place
and that my family —
and my life —
will be complete.

You can think of the Grecian sun,



but I care to think about all of the other days
I could share with you.
Not the days that create memories,
but the days that run into one another
and create the mood to one's life.
I think of arriving home from work
to start dinner —
the egg drop soup first, then the rice —
and when the shrimp is almost done
you walk through the door,
take off your coat, greet me with a kiss.
You boil the water and let the tea steep
as you say,
“You did all of this for me?”
But I don't know why that surprises you.
I just thought you'd like it.



have no backbone

I tried to put on the show for you
but no matter how good an actress is
she cannot become her part
I tried to show I loved you
I tried to act as if I cared
but I really didn't give a damn
not about you
and so I hid it
I hid my feelings
suppressed my emotions
and I acted like your daughter

I feel nothing
so I go through the motions
and it hurts me to think
that I really don't have a family

the flashbacks kill me
and so I do my best to forget
and to smile when I am told
but I can only smile for so long
when I really want to cry
and I really want to leave

but the thought of the curtain closing
hurts me more
than playing the part
so don't worry
the role is still filled
for as long as I do not have a backbone
and as long as I do not have a family
I will act



having children one day

Every time we're together we talk about how much we both love to play with children. I wanted you to meet my niece and nephew, Claire is five, Marshall is two and a half, oh, he's so adorable at this age, all he does is hug and kiss you. And it's so cute how he kisses you, you're holding him in your arms and he grabs the sides of your head with his tiny little hands and he kisses your nose. Well anyway, I just thought you'd think they were adorable, well, they are, but I just wanted to see you with them.

And you came over, and they saw you, and they were probably thinking, "a stranger, oh no, it's a stranger, run and hide, run and hide," and I really hope you didn't take offense that the kids were a little scared of you. What do you expect, they're little, they're afraid of anyone other than their mother holding them, I mean, you understand, right?

But I wanted you to see them, I wanted you to see the love I had for them, for the future, for their future, for my future, for our future. I just wanted you to see why my eyes glowed when I talked about them.

So the day went on and little Marshall sat down next to his daddy to watch t.v., and even though he didn't know you he sat down next to you, too. And earlier you kept doing cannonballs into the swimming pool so that you would splash Claire and I. She laughed when you did that, you know. I told you earlier that day that I felt like I was never wanted by my family before, I was unplanned, unwanted, neglected, blah, blah, blah, and you were saying you would never have an unwanted child. If one day your wife told you she was pregnant, you could never not love the child. That child would only enrich your life more, those were your words, I remember them exactly.

And I wanted you to know what it meant to me when at the end of the day the kids were leaving and I told little Marshall to give you a hug and he did. And he gave you a kiss, too, right on the nose, and without my asking. And you laughed. And you looked at me, laughing while this two year old boy clung to your neck and you gave me this look, this look that was almost serious. It was a look that said that one day this may be yours. And it may.

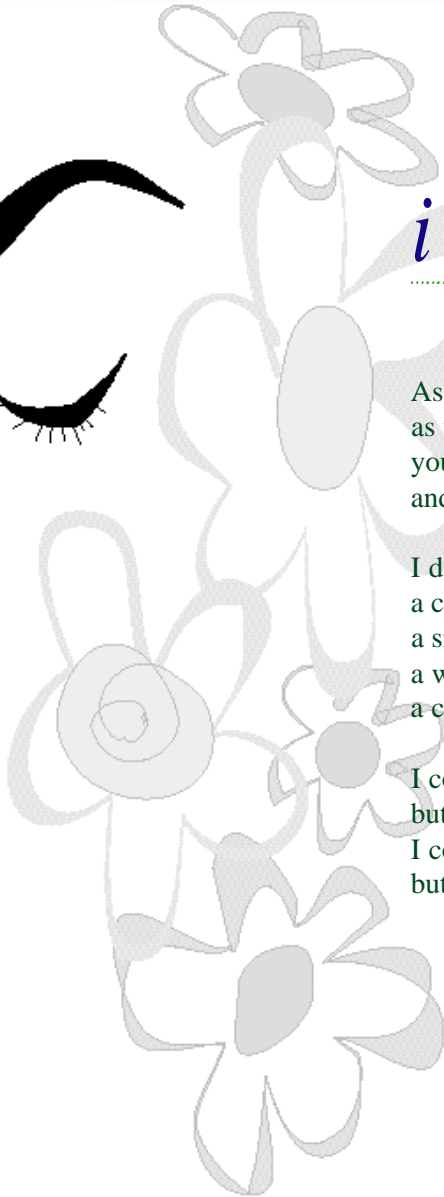
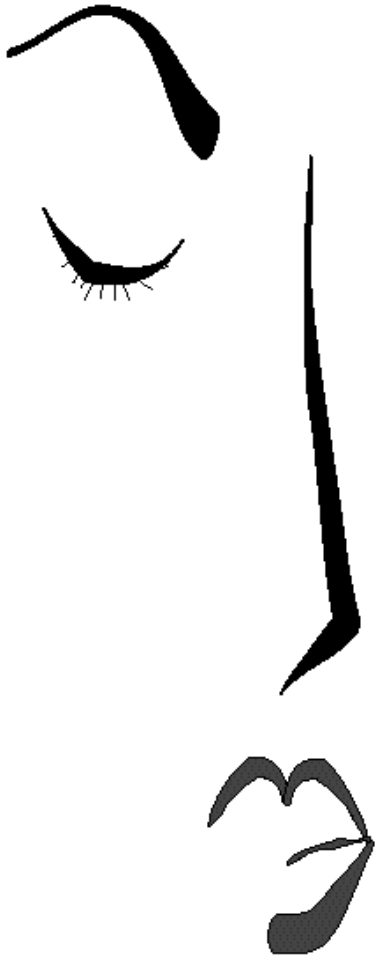
having company over

I was walking through the living room. My parents had company over. I was young. I could walk, but I could barely speak. There were maybe six or eight people over. Half of them were sitting at the bar. We had a bar. My parents would always sit there when they had company over. My father would stand behind the bar, like he was a bartender. He looked like he controlled everything. The lights were low. The carpeting was multi-colored — it was black with some different shades of brown and a little grey and white in it. In the light it looked like there were things in the carpet, like it wasn't clean.

I was little. I don't remember faces. I remember knee-caps. That's all a one-year old sees. I remember walking through the living room, between the bar chairs and the white couches. The bar chairs looked like barrels with red leather where the seat would be. The white couches looked old. They were my grandmother's. As I was walking, a woman came in front of me. For some reason I think she had short blonde hair, but all I really remember about her is that she was fat. She had fat knee-caps.

She asked me when my birthday was. I said, "June."

I remember that she got excited that I told her my birthday was in June. She turned toward the bar and started telling people that I just told her that my birthday was in June. I couldn't understand what she was getting so excited about.



i just waited

As I laid in the grass
as the breeze rolled past my face
you slept like a baby
and I just waited

I don't know what I was waiting for
a change that wouldn't happen
a smile of appreciation
a warm kiss in the cool afternoon breeze
a change that wouldn't happen

I could tell you I love you
but I'd be lying to the both of us.
I could tell you I need you
but yo

how a woman falls in love

I

Okay, here's scene number one: it's about three in the morning, you're in a wheat field with him. He pulled his junker off the country road, got out a blanket, and just started walking. You followed. The hip-high blades of grass were wet with dew, you can still feel the cool of the water when you think about it now. And you can smell the wheat, you can smell that it's green, that the acres in the dark are screaming with life.

He finds a spot and pushes the wheat down. Then the blanket goes. Then you go.

You remember that all you could see was a few stars in the sky, silhouettes of trees waving on the horizon, wheat hovering over you like skyscrapers. And him, kissing your arm, your shoulder, your cheek, your eyelid.

When the two of you leave, he tells you it's a little after four. And you don't believe him.

II

Okay, here's another scene: you're sitting at your desk, and out of the corner of your eye you see a jar of potpourri. There are about twenty white roses in the glass, they're still whole. You dried them yourself.

So when you see the roses you stop your work and let your eyes wander until they can't see anymore. And you daydream.

You remember him coming over with two dozen long stem white roses, taking you on a picnic. You ended up in the balcony of a music theatre eating croissants and strawberries with sugar, drinking champagne, listening to a pianist play Mozart on the stage below.

And you remember that he took you to dinner afterward, but what really sticks in your mind is that after dinner you brought him back you your place and you turned on the stereo and slow danced in the dark.

You moved away the next day. But you put all the roses and all the leaves and all the baby's breath in a small garbage can, filled it with some water and took it with you. And that's why you keep the roses dried on your desk.

III

Okay, I've got another one: you're fulfilling your end of a bet, so you take him out to an empty road one night, fully prepared to serenade him. But every thing starts to go wrong: the wind picks up

and you're shivering with a chill, you're coming down with a cold and sound nasal, you get nervous, he's going to hate it, you're going to make a fool out of yourself, and you can't even think of a good song to sing. So you're racking your brains for a good tune, you should have thought of this before, he's still there staring at you, and finally you remember this song from your childhood. Your older sister taped it for you, you don't even know who sings it, but all you ever thought was that it was a song about romance, about love lasting forever. So you just started to sing. In the back of your mind you always thought that song would be the song you shared with your husband. But you didn't tell him that part.

IV

So now jump ahead a couple weeks. You're at a bar with him, it's crowded, you're pretty drunk. After the bar closes he takes you to his car, his already pathetic car, you know, the one that stalls at intersections, and by now the driver's side door is stuck and won't open so he has to crawl in from your side. Well, he drives you to his house and he lets you in and he goes upstairs and he gives you a bouquet of flowers, and then he gives you this compact disc with the song you sang to him on it. He found out the name of the original singer, and by the fourth record store he found the song.

And he got it for you, girl. For you.

V

Alright, one more. No picnics, no serenading, no gifts. Here's the scene: you make dinner with him at your apartment. You set the table, lower the lights, turn on some big band music real soft. He opens the wine. As you eat, the two of you start talking.

About politics. About the upcoming election. About abortion. The death penalty. The judicial system. About the ethical dilemma in returning clothing to a retail store simply because you've worn it and don't like it anymore. About business. About the welfare system. About philosophy. So when you can't eat anymore you just kind of lean back in your chair and watch him. You smile. He's your intellectual equal. He talks to you.

You know, earlier that day you were looking through the want ads because you wanted a new apartment. And you mentioned, without thinking, that the two of you could save money by living together.

You still can't believe you said it. Or even thought it. But the thought is still there, haunting you, teasing you, in the back of your mind.

i just waited

As I laid in the grass
as the breeze rolled past my face
you slept like a baby
and I just waited

I don't know what I was waiting for
a change that wouldn't happen
a smile of appreciation
a warm kiss in the cool afternoon breeze
a change that wouldn't happen

I could tell you I love you
but I'd be lying to the both of us.
I could tell you I need you
but you wouldn't listen.
Sometimes I need to sleep
while someone watches over me.

I could just walk away
and let you sleep
yet I can't help but hope
that soon you'll arise from your slumber
and actually notice that I'm still there.
And be happy that I'm still there.



i listen

It always seems when we're together
you ramble on and on
and I just sit and listen.
You've often asked my why I don't talk as much,
or why I bother to listen to you.
I want to tell you why.

I like to hear your voice.
Your accent turns me on.
And every once in a while
you say something that I like to hear.
I like to watch the look in your eye
when you talk.
I like the emotion that wells up inside you.
There are two tiny little candle flames—
one in each of your eyes.
They flicker they jump
from one subject to the next.
The flame in your eye is hypnotizing.
Your emotion stirs me
and the love you possess
moves me to tears.

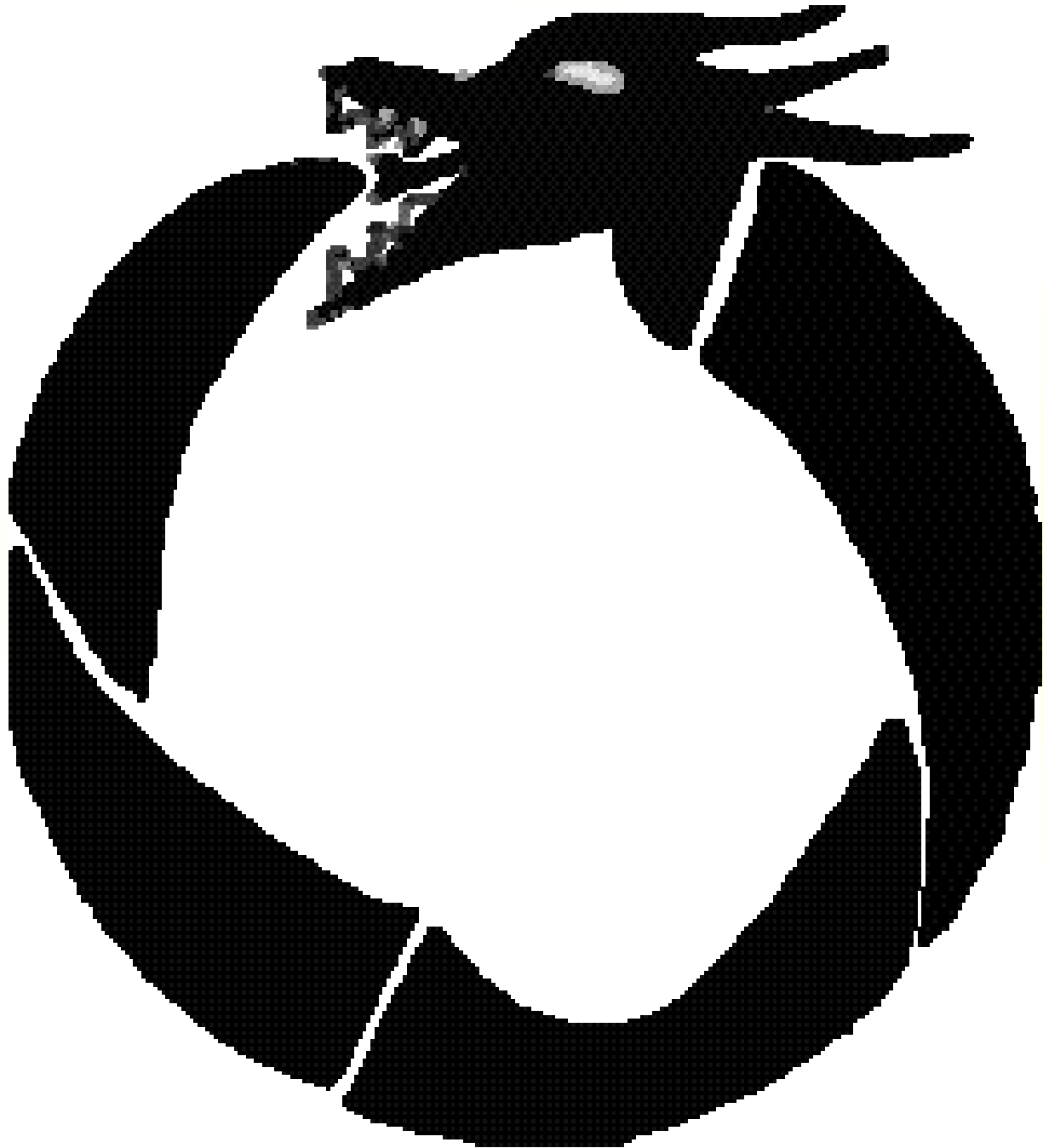
Besides,
I don't have to say anything.
I am content with merely
looking at your face and hearing your voice.
I, like you, can tell you how I feel
without saying a word.



i wanted pain

You screamed at me to pull over.
You wanted me to stop.
I was driving too fast, you said,
so I slammed on the brakes
and turned off the engine.
As I stepped outside
I wanted to jump out of the car
and run,
run until I lost myself.
And yet I wanted to fall.
I wanted to fall to the ground.
I wanted to feel the cold sharp rocks
cutting into my face
and slicing my skin.
I wanted pain to feel good again.
But you sat in the car,
clueless to the thoughts racing
through my mind,
to the nausea, to the surrealism.
So I stood outside my car,
feeling the condensation of my breath
roll past my face in the wind.
It was a constant, nagging reminder
that I still had to breathe.





janet kuypers • hope chest in the attic





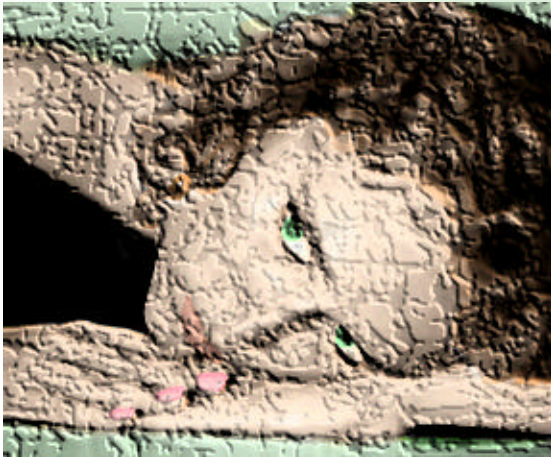




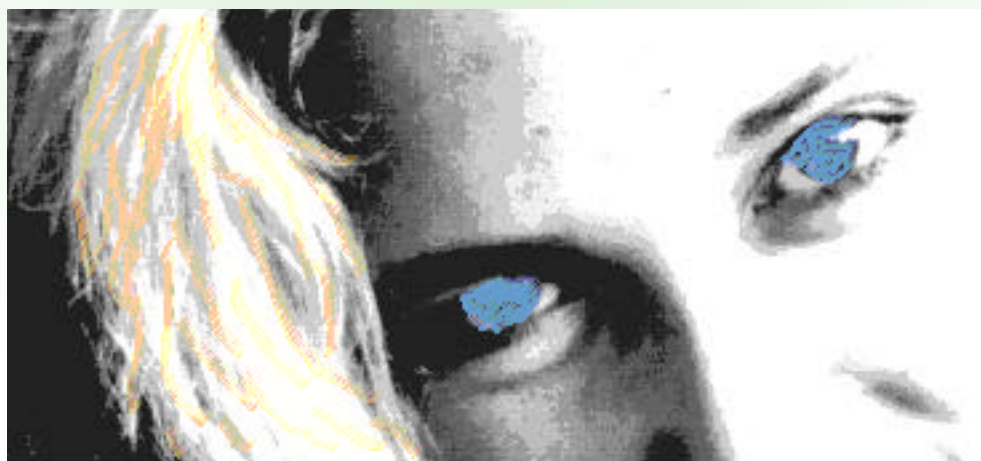












in the air

Part One

Over Las Vegas with my family, my sister and myself in one row, my parents in the other across the way. We're nearing the end of our flight; mother tells me to sit in her seat and look out the window as we fly over the Hoover dam. Sitting next to father, I watch him lean out the window saying, just think of all that concrete.

I look over his shoulder, the dam no larger than a thumbnail, the water, like cracks in a sidewalk, like the wrinkles in the palm of my hand.

Over Phoenix, preparing for another descent at 8:50 p.m., but it's usually fifteen minutes late, as it is now, I'm getting used to the schedule now. The mountains look like the little mountains you see on topographically correct globes, little ridges, as if they're made of sand, if you just lean your head down a little bit, your exhaling can make them all blow away in the breeze. And I know that what I'm looking for is out there, somewhere, I think this is where it is, I better not be wrong, I just have to search a little harder and find it. I love the city lights from above at night. Have you ever thought of how much power it takes to light all those buildings? All that energy. And every time I look, look out that little window with rounded corners,

i see a string of yellow Italian Christmas lights strung across the ground.

And little Champaign, Illinois, and those little airplanes that 25 people fit in. The airport there is really nice, actually, it's made for a bigger city, a city of dreams and tall buildings, that's what I think. The roar of the planes are so loud, though, not like those 747's where you can sleep during the flight. But they fly low enough so that I can see the building I live in from the sky. And where I work. There's the store. Neil Street. Assembly Hall. The bars.

Over Fort Myers, the city always looks different from any other place, all those palm trees, the marshes. Like you've just landed somewhere foreign, and pretty soon the big tour will begin. You can feel the heat, the humidity sticking your shirt to your back between your shoulder blades, and your neck, sticking to your neck too, from inside your cabin, before you even land.

Chicago looks grand from the sky with this huge expanse of lake next to it, like civilization crept up as far as it could but finally had to stop. The power of nature stopping the power of man kind, for once. And I cannot decide which one looks more evil. The lake does, looks evil i mean, at least at night, at night it looks like two spheres: a string of lights and a huge void. Daylight, and the snow on the ground looks dirty, too many cars have splashed mud on it as they drove by. And the sky always matches the

shade of grey of the snow: fitting for the city of the Blues. Maybe the snow is already that color, that perfect shade of grey, when it falls from the sky in this city.

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.

When I go on vacation and I promise people I'll write, I usually write from the plane, just so I don't have to worry about it for the rest of my trip. And I write their letter on an airsick bag. It's more interesting than paper.

I like the window seat, I like to look out the window. Clouds look like cotton balls when you're above them, and when you're landing cars look like little ants, on a mission, bringing food back to their hill. Little soldiers, back and forth, back and forth. And the streets look like veins, capillaries in some massive, monstrous body. And the farmland looks like little squares of colors. I wonder why each plot of land is a different color, what's growing there

that makes them different. Or maybe it's that some of them are turning shades of red and brown because some of them dying.

Once I was bumped from my flight, but on the next available flight they gave me first class. And I sat there, feeling underdressed. And afraid to order a drink.

And it always seems that you're stuck sitting next to someone that is either too wide for their seat, or is a businessman with his newspaper stretched out and his lap top computer on his little fold out table. 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.

john

at the other side of the room
I look through the cigarette smoke
the roar of conversation
and the dim lights
I look at his face
but I no longer see John
I have dreamt and envisioned
a God-like figure
I have imagined his sensitivity
and his thoughtfulness
I have felt his hands
caress my skin
his lips meet mine
he has held me
one thousand times
and protected me
I have rehearsed our moments
together in my mind
the moments I have created
the candlelight dinners
the dancing
the loving
while never knowing him more
than across a crowded room

the music blares
as I look over my shoulder
between the empty faces
and see his image
laughing
smiling
conversing with friends
my eyes flare with envy
I wonder why
he is not with me
but I know

the face across the room
is no longer John
it is a door to a dream
that will never
come to life

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. I had to use it sparingly — there wasn't much left. I got up as soon as I 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.

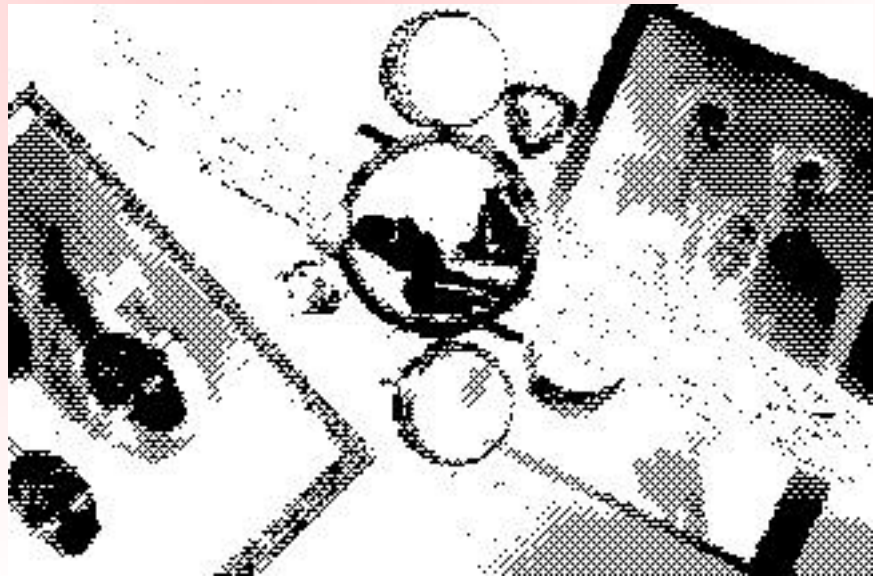
The floor was wet. I always wondered when the floors of bathrooms were wet if it was actually urine or just water from the sink. Or maybe it was from the sweat of all those men. I didn't know. I stepped on something under the sink in front of the mirror. I looked down. It was an open porn magazine. I 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.



medication

I

I set my alarm for 4:30 instead of 5:30 so I could roll over, take a pill, and fall back asleep. I'd leave two pills on the night stand with a glass of water every night. I could feel the pain in my leg, my hand, when I reached over to take the drugs. I'd feel it in my back, too. And sometimes in my shoulder. The water always tasted warm and dusty. It hurt to hold the pills in my right hand.

I closed my eyes at 4:32. I hated that damn alarm clock. And taking the pills early still wouldn't make the pain go away before I woke up. I knew that. But I took them anyway. And I tried to fall back asleep. And I dreaded 5:30, when I'd have to move.

5:40, I couldn't wait any longer, I couldn't be late, we couldn't have that, so I'd finally swing my legs to the floor. I'd put on my robe and limp into the kitchen. The trip to the kitchen lasted for hours. And picking up the milk carton from the refrigerator hurt like hell. This wasn't supposed to be happening, not to me. Just pour the damn milk. I'd wipe the tears from my chin and sit down for breakfast.

II

The doctor doubled the dosage, and he was amazed that I needed this much. He told me to follow the directions strictly, STRICTLY. "You can't take these in the morning the way you have been," he'd say. "You have to take them with food." That doesn't help when I'm crying from the pain in the morning. But I could get an ulcer, he'd say. And I wouldn't want that. Of course not. I just wanted the pain to go away.

Take one tablet three times daily, with meals.
Do not drink alcohol while on medication.

Take with food or milk. Do not skip medication.
Do not take aspirin while using this product.
Do not operate heavy machinery. May cause ulcers.

III

All I had to do was get through the mornings. The mornings
were the hardest part. Just take a little more pain, and
by the afternoon it will all be fine. Just fine.

An hour after the pills, and I'd start to feel dizzy.
I'd stare at a computer screen and it would move, in circles, back and
forth. I wanted to grab the screen and make it stay in place. But
I'd look at my fingers and they would go in and out
of focus. I'd feel my head rocking forward and backward;
I couldn't hold myself still. I'd sit at my desk and my eyes would
open and close, open and close. Before I knew it, ten minutes passed
and I remembered nothing. I could have been screaming
for ten minutes straight and I wouldn't have known it. Or crying.
Or sleeping. Or laughing. Or dying.
I had just lost ten minutes of my life, they were just taken
away from me, ripped away from me, and I could never
get them back.

And I could still feel traces of the pain, lingering in my bones.

IV

I'd sit up at night and just stare at the bottle. It was a
big bottle, as if the doctors knew I'd take these drugs forever.
Hadn't it been forever already? I'd open a bottle, look at a pill.
They looked big too. Pink and white. What pretty colors.

And then I'd think: If one tablet, fifty milligrams, could put me
to sleep in the morning, could make me dizzy, could take
a part of my life from me, then think about what the other
thirty-six could do. 1800 milligrams. It could kill me.
I wouldn't want that. Of course not.
But just think, the bottle isn't even full.

May cause ulcers. May cause dizziness. Side effects may vary for each patient. May cause weight gain. May cause weight loss. May cause drowsiness. May cause irritability. Medication may have to be taken consistently for weeks before expected results. If effects become severe, consult physician immediately.

V

I began to count. In the mornings I took eight pills: one multivitamin, one calcium pill, one niacin pill, one fish oil capsule, one garlic oil pill, and one pink-and-white pain killer that I was special to have, because you need a doctor's permission to take those. Then I took diet pills: one starch blocker, one that was called a "fat magnet." As if the diet pills worked anyway. But I still took them.

And then I had to watch the clock, take a pink-and-white at one in the afternoon, a different pill at five o'clock, another pink-and-white at six o'clock, and there was also usually sinus medication that I had to take every six hours in there, too. Or was it eight hours? I started to watch the clock all the time, I bought a pill container for my purse so that I would always have my medication with me.

When I'd feel my body start to ache again, I'd look at the clock. It would be fifteen minutes before I had to take another pill.





moonlight

moonlight is a hypnotist
putting people in a trance
whenever you look at it
it takes over your soul
no one can stop it
but no one wants to

motorcycle

you scared me. but i liked it.
i remember sitting behind you
on your motorcycle. i think
my fingers shook as i held your waist.
and i remember looking at my head
on your shoulder in the rear-view mirror.
and i smiled, because it was your shoulder.
as i felt more comfortable with you,
i moved my head closer
to your neck, smelled your cologne,
felt the warmth radiate from your skin.

you scared me. i clenched
your waist every time
i thought you should have used the brakes.
but i still sat behind you. besides,
it was a good excuse
to hold on to you.



Nonfiction

Let me tell you a story about a woman. I can't tell you her name, because the law prevents me. You see, this woman is the typical victim of a stranger rape. She was walking down the street after getting off of a late train from work and she was cornered by a man with a knife. She was violated, she was hurt, she had the blood stains and bruises to prove it. And she decided she wanted to report it.

She went to the hospital the next morning, after she put on an extra layer of clothing and huddled in her bed the night before, trying to sleep. The doctors took her clothing for evidence, and then they took samples.

She leaned back in a cold chair half-naked in a doctor's office, feet in straps three feet apart, and then they took samples from inside her to see if they could prove who was there. They pulled fifty hairs from her head and twenty-five pubic hairs with their fingers to compare them to what they brushed off her.

She then talked to the police. Because she couldn't identify him, because he had time to flee, because the police couldn't match the evidence to anyone, she couldn't find justice.

But her friends helped her through this. They slept in her room with her at night, when she didn't want to be alone. They listened to her. They accepted her. And she was able to take the first steps toward recovering.

It's a sad story, isn't it? She didn't deserve it. But it seems, especially with her attempts to find her attacker and with the support she received, that she may be able to eventually get over the pain.

Now I would like to tell you the story of another woman. I could tell you her name, but I told her I wouldn't.

She begged me not to.

She's a junior at a state university. The first day she came to college, the day she moved in, her boyfriend raped her.

He gave her roommate so much alcohol that she passed out, and wouldn't know what was going on. He gave his victim so much alcohol that she could barely think or move. During the course of the evening she wondered why her boyfriend was pushing alcohol on her roommate. Now she knows, hindsight is 20/20, and now she feels guilty. She should have said something to him, she thought, but what could she have said at the time? And why should she have suspected anything?

She didn't go to the hospital. She thought something was wrong with her only because she didn't want him. She thought what happened was normal. She couldn't understand why she was so hurt.

She didn't tell anyone. She didn't talk to her boyfriend about it — in fact, she didn't even break up with him until weeks later, when she couldn't take it anymore and had to come up with an excuse to avoid him.

No one understood why she was acting so strangely. No one understood her mood swings. No one understood why she would break into tears for no reason. She would stand in the bathroom of her dormitory, look in the mirror, and cry before she took her morning shower. She looked so tired in the mirror those mornings, like she had been attacked just the night before.

She waited about six months before she told anyone. She told one friend. He did everything he could to help her. But there wasn't much he could do. She never told her family. She felt ashamed. She felt alone.

And as she told more people, she received more support. But it only came one year, two years later.

You see, even though it wasn't her fault, and even though she had help from her friends, she still couldn't help but think that she could have done something to stop it. She teased him. She was drunk.

He was her boyfriend.

Now, these are two pretty depressing stories, I know. But when people hear the word "rape," they tend to think of story number one first. The man could have been jumping out from a bush, an alley, or breaking into her home in the middle of the night, as long as he was a stranger. He had a weapon. It was a crime. But both of these stories are similar, because they both are rape. Pure and simple. According to Illinois law, for example, if a woman is intoxicated, she cannot consent to sex, just as she cannot consent to driving a car. That alone defines what the second woman went through as rape. Her feelings, her pain, also define it as such. But still, the endings to these stories are very different.

Let's imagine that the woman in the second story pressed charges against her boyfriend. Better yet, let's take another crime, like a mugging in an alley, and ask the victim the same types of questions the woman in the second story, or even the woman in the first story, would be asked.

We'll set the scene: A man leaves a bar that he entered after work, took a short cut home and was mugged in an alley. He is now at the stand, testifying, being questioned by the defense.

"Now, let me understand this - you were in a bar, drinking."

"Yes."

"And you were talking to strangers, you even flashed around your money around."

"I bought a few people a beer. That's all."

"You bought a few strangers a beer. And what you were wearing - it was a nice suit. And your watch - it had to cost a lot. What were you doing in a neighborhood like that wearing clothes like that if you didn't want to be mugged?"

"That's not the point. I -"

“And you left the bar, and it was late. What time was it, sir?”

“12:30 in the morning.”

“Did you think it was safe for you to be walking alone at night, especially looking the way you did, in the neighborhood you were in?”

“Well -”

“Let me ask you another question. Have you ever given money to a charity before?”

“Yes, but I don’t see how that -”

“Now if you’re just giving it away freely, you’ve done it in the past, hey, you even bought drinks for complete strangers at the bar just hours before, then why wouldn’t this man think you were giving it away now?”

“Because, he was robbing me -”

“Well, did you see a weapon? Do you know for a fact that he had a weapon? And did you scream, yell, fight back at all?”

“He had something in his pocket, I thought it was a gun. I didn’t want to yell, I thought he’d hurt me. I panicked.”

“But you didn’t see a weapon, you didn’t yell, you were wearing that suit and flashing your money, you were in a bar and you were walking alone in a bad neighborhood late at night. Really, sir, some people would say you were asking for it.”

Society tends to blur the lines between sex and violence when the attacker is someone you know. The sexes are antagonistic toward each other: this is just an extreme. Men are taught to chase women, to try liquor or money to get a woman in bed, and women are taught to hold out sexually, which naturally puts the sexes against each other.

Women in society are taught to be “feminine”, to be giving, and to be weak instead of assertive. They are taught to look good for men, and they are taught that they are nothing unless they get married. They are taught that all they have is intuition, but it is usually wrong and they shouldn’t stand up for it. If a woman doesn’t feel comfortable in a situation, it is probably all just in her head and she should just get over it.

Men in society are taught to think of sex as a competition — by “scoring” and “getting some” — instead of thinking of it in terms of love and affection. Looking at terms for sex in today’s society shows this perfectly: scoring, banging, bopping, hammering, nailing, pumping, bagging. All are violent terms, and half of them are related to either hunting or building, typically male dominated activities.

Men are taught to look at women as objects - making them feel less than human, making them feel as if they should serve men. Harassment at the workplace, obscene phone calls, stalkers, wife beating, pornography, cat calls and whistling at woman on the street - none of these things would happen if this wasn’t the case.

And women are taught to make themselves objects for men, to bend over backwards to makes

themselves beautiful. Make-up, long styled hair, shaving their hair, wearing skirts, or high heels - half of these things are painful, and the other half are time-consuming, yet women are taught to do these things for men.

And maybe the woman in the second story knew she had friends she could trust, but still couldn't break free from what society taught her.

If you want a happy ending here, you're not going to find one. Not for these two women.

But maybe it would be easier for women to heal from rape if men and women began to see each other as people and not as just sexes.

Maybe then rape would end, too.

And then there would be a happy ending for everybody.

•••••

It is reported in some surveys that one out of every four women will be raped before they leave college, and that one out of three women will be raped in their lifetime. And 90% of these crimes are by someone they know (either someone they know well, like a boyfriend, husband or family member, or by someone they know, but not well, a coworker, a classmate, someone they met at a party or a bar earlier that night).

A University survey in Illinois reported that the three most common places for a rape to occur were: (1) in a dormitory, (2) the man's house/apartment, or (3) in a fraternity house. In other words, it doesn't happen in back alleys or behind bushes. It happens because the woman knew the man, and felt comfortable with going to his house. It happens because the man won the woman's trust.

Or it happened because the woman didn't really like the idea of going over to his place, or letting him in to her apartment after he walked her home, but felt like she couldn't tell him no, that she owed it to him. That maybe after a while he'd just leave. She wouldn't want to sound rude.

Women, as a rule, don't "cry rape," or falsely accuse someone of raping them. Most are frightened so much by the system that they don't even report it, and the incidence of "crying rape" is currently at about 2%, which is comparable to national averages for robbery. It is estimated that as many as 90% of all rapes go unreported, which is drastically higher than other violent crimes.

And why are so many women frightened by the judicial process? Because many times women are blamed for the rape, by men as well as women. Because men still equate this act of violence with the act of sex. Because on the stand, a woman has to defend her past, defend what she was wearing, explain why she went to his place, why she was alone with him, why she kissed him. The accused's past is protected, and in essence, the woman becomes the one on trial.

Many people want to blame the woman, however, because it's simply the easiest way. No one wants to go through life believing that a violent crime like this can just happen to them, for no known reason. If the woman is at fault, then she can change her behavior and not be at risk of being raped again. And other women can feel safe if they just don't let the wrong things happen. And men can feel safe that they're not doing the wrong thing. When in fact they may be.

And the effects of rape are longstanding. Some women leave the city they lived in, worked in, had friends and family in, because they are afraid they will see their attacker again. Some women have extreme difficulty ever sustaining an intimate relationship with a man again. Some women never tell their experience to another person, keeping their feelings bottled inside, eating away at them.

The world is a difficult place to live in for a person who is a rape survivor. Their values no longer make sense to them: if you can't trust a boyfriend, if someone you cared about could do this to you, what else could happen?

Different women react to rape in different ways, and the time it takes to recover from it varies greatly. Some will say you never recover. Many go through denial. After admitting it to herself, a rape survivor then begins to face those difficult questions: why did this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this? How could he do this? Can I ever tell anyone? Can I ever be close to another man again? Can I ever trust again?

Telling others also helps, because positive support from her friends will make her feel that her feelings of anger or hostility are justified, that it wasn't her fault, that she can get over it. But she may still harbor ill feelings for years, she may shy away from all relationships, she may become a man-hater, she may go on "sex-binges," using men the way she felt she was used, taking her revenge on others, and still not feeling any better.

The thing is, something can be done to stop this. Attitudes about women in general have to change, for sexism as a whole gives some men the mentality that this really isn't a crime. I mean, I bought her dinner, and what do I get for it? She's been holding out on me for so long, what is she trying to do? I gotta get some, and I know she wants me. It's not a crime, it's sex.

On the following pages are some of what I have written and created because of sexism and rape. It's a shame to have to see this work exist. Hopefully in time we as a culture will be able to make a change.

•••••

Most seem to feel that an act of rape, acquaintance or stranger, is just too bizarre to actually have no reason for happening, so most will look for a solution to the puzzle - an action that caused the rape, something to safeguard people from it. It may seem too strange to think that a man you've never met before could just come out of a bush, pick you out and attack you. It may seem too strange to think that a friend, or a boyfriend, or someone that you thought you could trust, could turn on you in such a way for no apparent reason and hurt you so much. In this world, things don't just happen— there's a reason for things, and there is sense in the world. Besides, the victim probably brought themselves into the trouble and therefore deserved what they got. If we as onlookers just don't make the same mistakes that they did, we won't have the same problems that they did. In this way unexplainable, traumatic acts such as rape can be explained away and therefore be easier to handle.

This is the line of reasoning that many people go through, and it is commonly called

“victim blaming.” It seems to make sense at times, but there is a note that we as a society have to remember: just as a robbery victim doesn’t ask to be mugged, a survivor of sexual assault doesn’t ask to be raped. No matter what reasons people come up with to defend a rapist, she was wearing provocative clothing, she was drunk, she kissed him - none of those things means that she consented to have sex with him.

If a woman can victim blame another woman, then she can eventually say to herself, “That has never happened to me, so it must have been something she did. Well, if I don’t do what they did, then I will be safe.” Since women have to live with the fear of rape all the time, victim blaming makes them feel better about the irregularities of the world. If a man blames a woman, it may be because he can’t understand that another man - possibly someone that he knows, possibly a friend - can do what the accused did. If another man has the capacity to do that, than that male onlooker may have that capacity, too. It’s a frightening thought to think that you could be a rapist. The man may eventually say, “I couldn’t do that, and therefore that other guy couldn’t do that. It must have been something that she did.”

Many victims will even blame themselves for what happened. I should have been more explicit in what I wanted. I shouldn’t have had so much to drink. I shouldn’t have been so nice to him. I should have said something afterwards: to him, to the police, to myself.

If there is a reason for everything, then there must be a reason for something as insane as rape - even if the reason doesn’t seem immediately apparent. Maybe, as many come to think, maybe the reason that it happened is because the victim led her attacker on or didn’t do enough to stop him. When someone blames the victim, the behavior is then correctable, and when the victim corrects that ‘wrong’ behavior, then they feel not only safer, but also a better person for correcting their own faults. If one keeps looking over the pieces of the puzzle, something will fall into place and make it all understandable, all comprehensible. If you keep looking for what the victim did wrong, you’ll find something, and then you will be able to explain away what happened. If the victim is blamed for what happened, then the problem of rape is solvable, avoidable, and correctable. It makes the world make sense again.

Victim blaming may, however, give women a false sense of security, if they feel they are safe by taking certain precautions, but not others. It is possible to be more aware of what is happening around you, to always stay with friends in social situations, to avoid walking in bad neighborhoods at night, but that doesn’t mean that you are at fault if something happened to you. And it doesn’t mean others are at fault if they were attacked.

When a woman speaks at a trial about someone who attacked her, instantly her past becomes important, her sexual history, what she was wearing, and so on. And the defendant’s criminal history is barred from use in the case, even if he was convicted of sexual crimes in the past. Instantly the woman is on trial, and the survivor of the rape is tried and not the rapist. It’s hard to understand something like rape. But that’s exactly what a survivor of an attack needs.

oh mother

perspiration
muscles tense
bring it all
in to the ground
resistance
fight the senses
keep control
as the energy
slowly escapes
from the pores
of your body
anxiety
frustration
you can't run away
you can't escape
the pressure
the conflict
breath quickening
heart beating
faster and
faster
shake and

shiver
the trauma
too great
the exhaustion
you can't
give in
but you must
so you collapse
at the stress
and let
the shovels
throw the dirt
over your
head

one summer

1.

Kevin. You went off to work, I was alone in your apartment, an apartment on a street corner in Washington D.C., my first trip alone. You gave me your key, said you'd be home after work. And so I left, closing the iron gate door I was so fascinated with behind me. I walked through campus, stretched out in the sun. I tucked the map in my pocket, walked through M street, took the correct turns. I remember someone on the street complimented my shirt. I was almost sure I had been in this town before.

And then I met this fellow, tall, unlike you, and we went out, and I knew I didn't have a care in the world, all my ties were almost broken, I was almost free. And I'd never see this man again. Maybe I'd let him kiss me. And as I walked down the street that night with him, I skipped. And he liked me that much more.

2.

Sheri. The heat of Arizona smelled like burning flesh. I met your roommate, your friends, drank at the Coffee Plantation, iced mocha coffees. And I met



you-know-who,
I still don't want to say his name.
He kept me occupied, no, he made me feel alive,
alive to someone who had never lived before,
alive those long five days. I could still mark the day
on my calendar, the day my life was supposed to
change, the day I was supposed to be free. But
it was supposed to be something
good, I was
supposed to start caring for myself. Then why
does a part of me regret it?

He bought me a rose the day I left. And you
took pictures of us.
I thought that morning that it would be justice
to never hear from him again. To leave it at that.
But then I had to call him from the airplane
on the trip home. Why?

3.

Joe. You had to be cruel to me, just this once. I thought
we had been through enough, went through
our own little hells already because of each
other. I know
we had our differences, but I was looking forward to
seeing you, to seeing southern California, the
stores, the glamour, the beaches, the
commercialism. And you, you had to cart me away
with your religious troops to the wilderness,
leaving me at the campsite while you went off
to church. And I sat there for days,
watching us, watching us
become bloodthirsty, we were trying to
hurt each other, we were
like animals, you starting your life with me in tow.

And I saw the redwood forests.

4.

.....

Douglas. I never imagined how beautiful the east coast could be, rolling hills curling one state into another. We'd drive up a hill in your truck and I would lift my head, my chin as high as I could in anticipation to try to see the other side, the sloping down of those hills. I remember walking along the beach in Maine, restored buildings lining the rocky shore, the fog so thick you couldn't see fifty feet in front of you. And people were suntanning. And I photographed the lighthouse - how do they work in the fog like this? It's so thick, thick like the cigarette smoke coming from the inside of your truck when we would drive to antique shops in New Hampshire. Thick, like a powerful force overcoming someone, that holds you there, that doesn't let go. Like us.

5.

.....

A week before the smoke and the hills
I was in the Midwest and
my father was screaming at me,
two weeks before I was thousands of miles away
dreaming of someone else. And it wasn't a month ago
when I was skipping past the old Kennedy house,
where movies were made, where this all began.



And now, in this truck with you,
I lean back, watching the scenery travelling past me
streamline into blurred lines of color,
and I think of marriage. Maybe with you,
if time wears on, but probably not, I just
think of marriage, to someone. Marriage,
streamlining life into a blur. Settling down.
Settling. It's funny how your surroundings change you.



And soon, I know, I will go back home,
carrying my possessions in a tweed bag
with duct tape on the handle, to get back to
something.
Driving through the plains to go back to life,
it will all be the same again.

park bench

I saw you sit at the park bench. Every day you would go to that one bench, reading the paper, feeding the pigeons, minding your own business. Every day I would watch you. I knew how you adjusted your glasses. I knew how you crossed your legs.

I had to come out of hiding. I had to know you. I had to have a name for your face. So before you came to the park bench I sat down and pulled out a newspaper. I looked up when I heard your footsteps. I knew they were your footsteps. You walked to another bench. No— you couldn't sit there. That's not how the story goes. You have to sit here.

The next day I waited for you before I made my move. You walked back to your bench. I strolled up to the other side, trying to act aloof. I sat down, only three feet away from you. I pulled out my day-old paper. My eyes burned through the pages. I felt your breath streaming down my body. I heard your eyelids open and close. Your heat radiated toward me.

I casually looked away from my paper. You were gone.



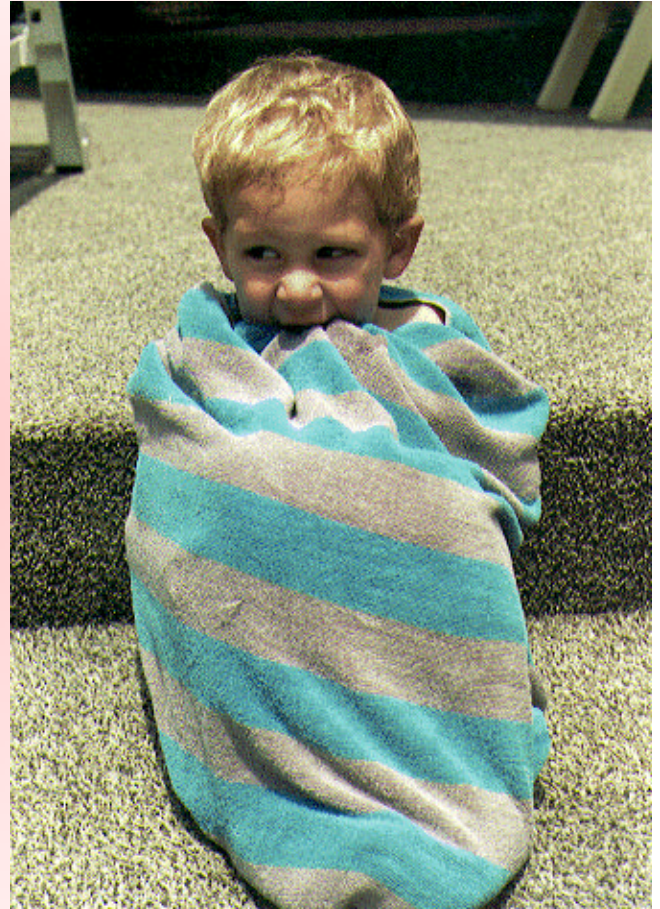
photograph, nineteenth century

that woman that picture
the images of beauty and softness
of something that shouldn't be touched
that couldn't work that can't work
the sepia toning oh how ancient
oh the dependency oh the degradation

my mind has been cluttered
society's a bastard
I can't see the women
I see the hat the feather
the adornments of beauty
the preposterous impractical way
she has been made to be seen
and not heard

she's only an image
she was forced with an image
is it a shame is it a sin
and now I've been tainted
with the knowledge of society
with the knowledge of it's motives
and now I can't even see the beauty
I can only see the oppression

"oh, it's not like that anymore" they say
as I wipe the make-up off my eyelids
and wonder who I'm trying to impress



republican

I walked with you
and it seemed like we walked for hours
and it seemed strange
walking
trying to stretch the conversation
trying not to think
that you were not the one

when you jokingly pushed me
and I grabbed your arm
you pulled me back
and held me close
and I didn't know what to think
I felt our hands together
and I didn't know if it was right

and when we sat
in the park
I didn't know what to expect
as we sat there
and talked
about the future
the past
and republicans

my mind was so confused

and when we sat in my room
I tried to think
about what I was doing
but I didn't know
I didn't know
if I was trying to get something
I didn't want
I didn't know
if I should bother
or if I just didn't care



right there, by your heart

I

i had a dream the other night that i was in a bathroom, sitting on the toilet seat, i think it was the one in florida, but it could have been anywhere. it was a small bathroom. i was stretched over this seat, and i think the lid was up. i was naked. there was a wall right next to me, and i felt cramped, like i couldn't move. and then kurt was there, with me, in the bathroom, naked, standing over me, screwing me. i was sitting on a toilet seat and he was fucking me, and in the entire dream i couldn't get comfortable, i felt very awkward, it felt like he was pressing on my chest, i couldn't breathe, it felt like there was a rock in my stomach that would stay there forever, but the entire time i didn't complain.

II

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?

III

it had already been a long day, sitting in the back
of someone else's car for two and a half hours,
knowing that if elaine's dad wasn't such a slow driver
it would have taken less than two hours. I was trying to get
home so i could make it on time for the christmas party
but still have enough time to pack for my early
flight the next morning. airports have become a second
home to me. so i walked in through the melon doors
only three hours late, those melon doors that scream
of the perfect fifties home, of the perfect fifties family
that everyone believed we were. i walked through the
doors, sarah hugged me, and dad walked into the
hallway from the kitchen. wait a minute. he was
supposed to be on the other side of the country... well,
don't ask questions, just act happy to see him. so i smiled
and laughed, until he hugged me. then the rock settled
in. he didn't have to say a word. my mind started
going through the checklist: okay, what would have
brought him back here? who was the one who had died?
i said 'grandma' before he did. i cried for fifteen
minutes, wiped the tears from my neck, my ears, and
i got ready for the party, trying not to move too quickly,
so not to disturb the rock.

IV

i got the mail, like i do any other day, and by then i had
almost forgotten about waiting for the test results. i
was just getting the mail, like normal. when i saw the
letter from the hospital that day in that little metal

box the pressure on my chest came rushing back like wind when it rushes around the side of a building and it takes you entirely by surprise and you lose your breath trying to live through it. what if the test results said i was sick, and i wasn't going to get any better? i had too many symptoms, the results had to show something. something, damnit. maybe if i never opened the letter, i'd never have to deal with illness. maybe then i'd live forever. but i opened the letter. it said the doctors still know nothing. i just wanted to know what was wrong with me. why i wasn't perfect. the pressure on my chest didn't go away when i threw the envelope on the ground by the mailbox. i walked upstairs.

V

i needed to talk to someone, so i threw my bathrobe on the floor, pulled on some sweats, and walked over to his apartment. steve was supposed to be coming home from work soon, and i needed to talk to somebody, i couldn't keep everything bottled in. i must have looked like an idiot standing on his stairs looking like i was about to cry. i felt like an idiot there, too, not knowing why the rock in my stomach wasn't going away. i wanted to ask him if he ever felt that rock, felt that pressure, even if there didn't seem to be a reason for it at all except for maybe life itself, which everyone was supposed to manage through anyway, i mean, everyone has stress, what's your problem if you can't take it? i wanted to figure it out, whatever the hell it was that was bothering me, i really wanted to. this panic was driving me crazy, and i couldn't even explain why i was panicked in the first place. i didn't tell him i wanted to light a candle and some incense and just curl up in the corner of my bed, holding one of my pillows, probably the black one, and cry for a very long time. i sat there in his apartment when he got home, but i didn't speak. what

could i say? that the rock in my stomach wasn't going away?

VI

i 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.



robert

I stand in a room full of strangers
leaning against a wall
a wallflower
but I was content with knowing no one
with knowing you

beer glass in hand
you introduce me to
the vast assortment of drunken fools
you call your friends
and I stand there
merely happy to be by your side

a stranger
intoxicated to the point of being comatose
tells me I'm pretty
but I really don't care
because I have you
you are all I need

as the rest of the party imbibes to no end
and you take yourself
down the road to oblivion
I stay leaning
leaning against the wall
and I watch
you sing a song with your buddies
laugh at the stupidest jokes
eat dog food
and I keep thinking
that this was all I needed to be happy



you seemed to be
all that mattered in the world to me
how was I to know
that I was leaning against the wall
because you gave me no support



salesman

The doorbell rang. “Who could be stopping by at this hour?”, I thought, but I put my magazine down and walked to the door. A man in a plaid suit stood in the hallway with a worn briefcase in his hand. He flashed me a tired, business-like smile. It almost seemed genuine.

As he rambled on and on about... Well, I don’t really know what he said. I don’t even know what he wanted. “What is he selling?”, I thought, and my head became dizzy with his confusing words. It all seemed like nonsense. But it all seemed to make sense.

I didn’t like what I heard. But I tried to listen. I wanted to listen. I had to hold on to the door frame: I had to keep myself steady while this man’s thoughts tried to knock me down.

I finally stopped him. “What are you trying to sell me? What are you trying to do?”, I asked. The man looked at me and said, “I’m trying to sell you an ideology. I am trying to poison your mind.”

I slammed the door in his face. Alone, I let go of the door frame. I fell down.

scars

Like when the Grossman's German shepherd bit the inside of my knee. I was baby sitting two girls and a dog named "Rosco." I remember being pushed to the floor by the dog, I was on my back, kicking, as this dog was gnawing on my leg, and I remember thinking, "I can't believe a dog named Rosco is attacking me." And I was thinking that I had to be strong for those two little girls, who were watching it all. I couldn't cry.

Or when I stepped off Scott's motorcycle at 2:00 a.m. and burned my calf on the exhaust pipe. I was drunk when he was driving and I was careless when I swung my leg over the back. It didn't even hurt when I did it, but the next day it blistered and peeled; it looked inhuman. I had to bandage it for weeks. It hurt like hell.

When I was little, roller skating in my driveway, and I fell. My parents yelled at me, "Did you crack the sidewalk?"

When I was kissing someone, and I scraped my right knee against the wall. Or maybe it was the carpet. When someone asks me what that scar is from, I tell them I fell.

Or when I was riding my bicycle and I fell when my front wheel skidded in the gravel. I had to walk home. Blood was dripping from my elbow to my wrist; I remember thinking that the blood looked thick, but that nothing hurt. I sat on the toilet seat cover while my sister cleaned me up. It was a small bathroom. I felt like the walls could have fallen in on me at any time. Years later, and I can still see the dirt under my skin on my elbows.

Or when I was five years old and my dad called me an ass-hole because I made a mess in the living room. I didn't.

Like when I scratched my chin when I had the chicken pox.

seven miles

Okay, so you were going to be in Chicago for a few hours, and then you'd be driving out of town again, and I really wanted to see you, so I said I'd be more than happy to drive to the city to see you for an hour or two. Okay, let's meet at the Planetarium, I said, because it would be the quickest place for me to get to from the interstate, besides, you were in the city anyway, you'd easily get to the Planetarium before I would. So okay, we'd meet at 3:15, you said, and I got off the phone and rushed out the door.

And I got there, traffic was a bitch, but I got there, parked my car and then proceeded to walk back and forth looking for you. Where the hell was he, he didn't have much time before he had to leave, where could he be, it's been over twenty minutes, what trouble has he gotten himself into now? Knowing him, he probably thought I said the Aquarium and was waiting at the building a block away from me, the big jerk. And all these men were staring at me, like they've never seen a woman in a suede skirt before, one of them even said hello to me, and I had to sit there and try to ignore everyone and brood because you were late. You probably crashed the car and were bickering over insurance with someone while I sat there. Made me drive for a couple of hours for nothing.

So then I finally see you sprinting up the block. Your oxford is unbuttoned, and the closer you get, the more red you look. Okay, now I'm intrigued. "Where have you been?" I asked, and as you're panting in a vain attempt to catch your breath you explain that you couldn't get the car out of the parking lot because the person who has the ticket stub for the car is in the doctor's office, so you ran seven miles to get here so that I wouldn't wait.

Okay, I feel like a heel. And you never cease to amaze me. I know you said you'd go to the ends of the earth for me. Seven miles is more than enough.

sheri

*best friend plays
house, 1977*

It's funny to think about how we would fight and fight, I wanted to be the secretary, no, you wanted to have the date tonight, I wanted to use this purse. Sandy would have to come in to the basement to see why we were yelling at each other. But I remember one thing we used to always do when we played house, or office, or dress-up. One of us would suggest going to John's Ice Cream Parlor, and our rehearsed plan would immediately begin. You would walk to the door, I would walk to the freezer. One the count of three you would cough to muffle the sound of the ice box door opening from my parents, and then we had access to as much chocolate ice cream as we could handle. I think it was the one time when we would never argue.

*best friend spends the
night, 1981*

Do you remember when we'd make tents from our comforters, making little homes from our twin-sized beds? And we'd have pen lights and old calculators for light under the blankets, and they'd be just enough light for us, but not enough for my parents to see, so they'd think we were sleeping. I remember I'd always hog the lights — the little calculator that lit up green that Sandy gave me, the yellow pen light that was running out of power anyway, or a little pocket video game with red numbers that lit up the screen. And I would always use the dowel rod from the Bears pennant that hung in the corner of my apple-green bedroom to hold up my blanket. You would have to make due with whatever else you could find. God, I was a bratty kid. you should have stood up to me.

*best friend loses
father, 1991*

When you called me to tell me your father died, i wanted to tell you that i'd give you the bigger dowel rod, or even that calculator. I heard you crying from that god-damn hollow plastic telephone, and I remembered how you would always come over because you didn't want to stay in your own

home, with your own family. As if my family was much better. But now you're crying for him back, when all your life you ran from him. And I wanted to bring him back for you. But I couldn't, so I did what I do best - I got drunk at a local bar. I found some friends who happened to be there, and they consoled me for your loss, something I couldn't even do for you. Best friend.

best friend gets married, 1992

I know I got aggravated when you got hysterical over your wedding plans. When you couldn't find the right hurricane lamp covers for the centerpieces for the tables for the reception. Maybe they'll have them at the warehouse, Janet, why don't you come with me, you do all the talking, you know what you're talking about. When you couldn't get all 300 chocolate guitars wrapped in tulle, then cellophane, then tied with gold foil with stars on it, then tied with the picks you punched holes in, picks that say on them, "Sheri and Warren". Janet, you're the only person who showed up to help me, why isn't anyone else here, hey, I think you're cutting

the tulle too big.

None of your bridesmaids better get pregnant, you said, because the dresses wouldn't look right on them. And why is everyone complaining about two inch heels? And why isn't anyone else interested in my wedding?

I just wanted to let you know that I was interested in your wedding. Really.

I was interested in the french door you got for the pantry in your new home. I wanted to make sure the shine didn't come off the beads on the wedding dress when they sent it to the cleaners.

I wanted to see if the dress could fit me. Ah, probably not, you're so petite, and just think, you used to be taller than me when we were younger, playing Barbies on the pool table in the basement. I think I had a wedding dress for Barbie. The dream dress. And now I'll get to see that dress on you.

The other day my father said that he's glad to see one of his daughters get married without him having to foot the bill. He thought you'd laugh at that.

Maybe he won't have to foot the bill. But he'll still be losing a daughter. And I'll be wiping the tears from my eyes.



slate
and
marrow

I

No one could understand, it was like every morning I couldn't find a reason to wake

up. The world felt cold, like slate, like the marble tiles in the front hallway of my

parent's house, that floor was always cold, oh, how I'd like to feel the cold against my feet

now. But there I was, in some eleven by twelve apartment, room, running from my past, my

present. Every morning I would wake up, and I would wake up from that night again -

when he came uninvited, or did I invite him? The haze of the drunken nights from then on,

wearing the dress, knowing the faceless faces couldn't care less, as long as they could have their way

with me later that night. What would my parents think of me now? I'm no longer their little girl.

I could feel myself getting older by the minute, I could feel my skin wrinkling, my joints getting

stiff. I could feel my bones, the marrow drying up, my bones crumbling away. And every morning

I still put on my clothes, got my work together, headed out the door. Could I ever get out of this

cycle? And it was if I had never realized that all this time I was looking for a purpose. And it was you.

II

When I strolled up to the street singer, I stopped because I saw your face. Why on earth did you

think you could tell me your secrets when we only met fifteen minutes before? And just being in your

presence made me break down, made

me hate everything, made me love everything, made me want

change. I'd hit you in rage, I'd lean on you, my slate, and you let me. And it was as if the marrow was back.

I could just lay in bed at night and feel the blood running through my body, I could feel the oxygen as I

inhaled hitting my bloodstream. I could even feel the marrow, all the cells in my body moving faster and

faster. My skin would tingle. I suddenly had power - I could make blood move to any part of my

body, I could make a pain go away, I could turn myself into stone, not so I was cold and unfeeling, but so

I was strong, immovable. And I did it for me, but don't you dare think for a minute that I didn't do it for

you.

soybeans

Have you ever jumped in a vat of soybeans before? It's very strange, it feels like you're a kid in one of those playground things where you jump in a pit of colored plastic balls. Except soybeans are a lot smaller than those balls in the playgrounds, and I guess they don't have all those colors. Well anyway, I went over to his grandparent's farm, and he decided to take me on a tour of the farmhouse. The cows were smelly, I made sure I kept my distance, and I just kept calling to them, saying, "hello, moo-cow." And there were a bunch of cats running around the field, and we picked up a couple kittens and held them up high in the air. I kept asking the cats, "do you love me?" and he kept asking me why I was asking for approval from cats. Then we gave them some milk from his uncle's farmhouse. And then he took me up a ladder to the top floor of the barn. That's when he proceeded to take off his shoes and jump over into a ledge. He told me to join him. I couldn't quite see what I was about to jump into, it was almost dusk, but I took off my shoes and socks and jumped in anyway.

And my ankles sunk into the soybeans. And I started laughing. And I fell, and then I started to bury myself in soybeans. And then I jumped around a few more times, then I just started throwing soybeans at him.

And then I just laid down in the pit of soybeans for awhile. They felt cool on my skin. I could feel the dust from them covering my legs, my calves.

There are time like that, times when I just have to let go.





tall man

I can feel your presence across the room
a movement a stir

your long shadow stretches across the walls

an occasional glance
I'll take whatever I can take

a stranger
yet I feel I know you all too well

the apartment

“Could you pull out a can of sardines to have with lunch?”, he asked me, so I got up from my chair, put down the financial pages, and walked into the kitchen. The newspaper fell to the ground, falling out of order. I stepped on the pages as I walked away. I realized he hadn’t been listening to a thing I said.

He had to look for a job, I had told him before. This apartment is too small and we still can’t afford it. I put in so many extra hours at work, and he doesn’t even help at home. There are dishes left from last week. There is spaghetti sauce crusted on one of the plates in the sink. I opened up the pantry, moved the cans of string beans and cream corn. There was an old can of peaches in the back; I didn’t even know it was there. I found a sardine can in the back of the shelf.

I saw him from across the apartment as I opened up the can. “We have to do something about this,” I said. “I can’t even think in this place. I’m tired of living in a cubicle.”

He closed the funny pages. “Get used to it, honey. This is all we’ll ever get. You think you’ll get better? You think you deserve it? For some people, this is all they’ll get. That’s just the way life is.”

I looked at the can. I looked at the little creatures crammed into their little pattern. It almost looked like they were supposed to be that way, like they were created to be put into a can. The smell made me dizzy. I pushed the can away from me. I couldn’t look at it any longer.

the burning

I take the final swig of vodka
feel it burn it's way down my thro
hiss at it scorching my tongue
and reach for the bottle to pour my
I think of how my tonsils scream
every time I let the alcohol rape m
Then I look down at my hands —
shaking — holding the glass of po
and think of how these were the h
that should have pushed you away
But didn't. And I keep wondering
why I took your hell, took your po
I remember how you burned your
through me. You corrupted me
from the inside out, and I kept con
I let you infect me, and now you've
burned a hole through me. I hated
Now I have to rid myself of you,
and my escape is flowing between
ice cubes in the glass nestled in m
But I have to drink more. The burn
doesn't last as long as you do.



the cycle

It all came to her like this:
she remembered when she was a child
coloring eggs
for Easter, wire spoons
dipping into the cup; colors of spring
and happiness
left to dry on a newspaper.
And she would always steal some away
to eat
before Sunday. And she
would hide the pastel shell in the trash,
the evidence,
and she'd hide the yolk,
too. She only liked the white of it. And
then she
remembers the onion skins,
boiling eggs wrapped in layers of skin
dyed them
beautiful shades of brown,
like the amber beads in mother's jewelry
chest, the
variations of color,
trapped by nature, captured by ourselves.

And she remembers
as a child listening to the McKinleys, an
older pair

with stories of
Panama, Mexico. They had so many foreign
stories to tell:

once they gave her an
egg for Christmas, a carnival egg, with the
inside blown

out, filled with confetti,
covered in colorful crepe paper. She
made her own,

relished in cracking
them over people's heads. But she saved
theirs.

And now she stands
in the kitchen, scrambling them for
morning meal,

yellow and white,
the colors in the nursery for the child
still inside

of her. She can feel
the kicking now. And she wants to know
if she can give

the color, the stories,
bring the cycle of life around for her little
one.

And she puts breakfast once again
on the plate.

the dream

I walked past the slide
almost stepping on the boulder in a children's marble game.
As I stopped at the swing set,
I heard two girls talking.
Slap bracelets, plastic purses, bows in their hair.
The blue-eyed blonde said to the brown-eyed brunette,
"If you dream that you die,
you will."
Those brown eyes exploded with fear.

As I walked away,
I stopped and leaned against the jungle gym.
The memories bombarded me—
Why did I have that dream?
Why did I stop myself?
Why didn't I die?

It was four years ago.
I was walking in a field
where the brown weeds stood a foot tall,
almost entirely covering the wretched, abandoned train tracks.
The pollution-grey sky
occasionally hurled its anger at the ground,
making rippling waves in the dead grass and straw.
I never asked why I was there.
Holding my denim jacket closed with one hand
I put my left hand in the coat pocket.
I felt the cold steel in my hands
and pulled the .22 pistol out into the light.
The polished silver-grey barrel
reflected my fingerprints.
I never asked why it was there.



I stopped walking,
switched off the safety,
turned the gun toward my stomach,
wrapped my finger around the trigger,
pressed my eyes shut, and fired twice.
But I opened my eyes
and stared at the waving weeds
as I felt the heat and the force radiate through me.
As I stood there, I began to hunch over
and all of my senses slowed down.
The weeds moved slowly, and as I started to walk,
my steps became shorter, yet longer to take.
Feeling dizzy, I couldn't even think.
But I knew it should hurt, and I waited for the pain,
but I just wasn't dying fast enough.
So I tried to keep walking,
but it felt like I was falling,
and I turned the revolver to my stomach again and fired.
I felt the jolt. I felt the force. I felt the heat.
But it just wasn't working.
I just wasn't dying.
So I moved the gun to the side of my head.
One shot rang out.
My ears were ringing — slowly but violently.
Why wasn't I dying?
I shot at the temple again, and once more.
Walking, slowly, now used to the heat
and only feeling tired.
Then a voice in my head told me to stop the dream
and I woke up.
Beads of sweat dripped down from my temple.
I tasted them
to make sure it wasn't blood.

I pushed myself away from the jungle gym
as I watched the girls on the swing set.
The brunette stared at the blonde in innocent amazement.
They're all just lies.
I turned around and walked away,
kicking the dead grass.



the flashback

Everyone at work wondered
why she looked so down that day,
and occasionally someone would ask her.
“What’s the matter?” And she’d
say it was just a bad day.
And she went through the
motions, she did her work, she
ate her lunch, even though the lettuce
tasted bad, and then she had to
run an errand for the boss.
And she was in her car, it
was snowing, but not the pretty
kind of snow, not the kind you expect to see
on Christmas day. It was like the
snow was already dirty and gray
before it hit the ground.
And she was driving, and she
didn’t even realize she was going under the
speed limit. She was in a daze, lost, not
because of depression, but because
there was nothing she cared
to think about. And so she drove.
And she dropped off the crate of
flyers and the mailing list for the boss,
and she drove back, but the whole way
she was thinking that she
should drive slower, so she wouldn’t
be back at work so fast. And so she
drove slowly, coasting now, watching the
dirty snow touch her windshield.
And she looked over to her
left, and there was an old man, lowering
his car from the jack it was on. A flat

tire. And then she had a flashback.
And it was no longer winter, and
she was no longer driving -
she was outside, while he was trying
to fix the flat on his rusty white car.
They were driving back from a park, it
was summer in Monticello, it must have been
ninety degrees, and there
she was, sitting on a dirty beige carpet
scrap from the floor of the car. She had
taken the scrap and moved off the dirt
road, about ten feet into
the field. And she just sat there,
watching him, shirtless, fixing the car
so they could drive home. And she
wanted to remember it, just like that.
Then the light turned green,
she followed the procession of cars
through the graying snowflakes. And
she began to forget it was a bad day, and
she didn’t mind her daze.

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 scribblings,
"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



the muse, the messiah

I

I can see you now
hunched over, pouring yourself into
your work, scattered papers,

dim lights flooding
white over the glaring screen, in
your otherwise

darkened corner of the
world. And I know you can feel me
now, feel me rushing in

through the window
that you leave only slightly open
at night,

rushing in with a faint
whistle, circling around your neck, curling
up around your

jaw, opening your mouth
so slightly. You can feel my rush
chilling your teeth.

You tilt your head
back, closing your tired eyes
from your problems,

from your future in front
of you, on those pages, on that screen,
under that white

light. You let me open your
mouth more and more, you feel me
swirling around your tongue,

down your throat, into
your lungs, like smoke from a clove
cigarette when you hold

your breath to feel
the high, feel the ecstasy just a little
longer, or like steam rushing

down your throat when you
take a deep breath the summer morning
after a heavy fog.

You open your eyes.
You lick your lips. I make you
do that, I make you

forget your world. You can
feel me there, you can't escape me. I'm
there. I'm your muse.

II

And I'm sitting in my
apartment, and when I reach out my arm
shadows of my hand

stretch across the wall.
There is no music, but I begin to
move my hands, like

a ceremony, as if to
a drummed out rhythm, like the pant
of a mistress as she

walks down the hotel steps
into her car after seeing her savior, like waves at
the sea slowly crashing

at the shoreline.
The phases of the moon are changing,
and the waves are crashing

with more and more
intensity, with more and more
power, faster and

faster. And at this very
moment you walk down a street somewhere,
it is daylight,

and you see the white moon
peering toward you from the sky. The
moon was looking

for you. It wanted to
watch you. You divert your eyes,
step off the curb,

and for no reason walk
in the middle of the street. There is no traffic.
You are safe. And

the moon watches the stride
of your step, and the moon watches my hand,
and the moon hears

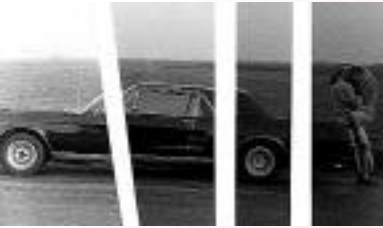
the rhythmic pant of
intensity, and the moon rises the water.
We feel the drumming beat.

The phases of the
moon are changing. There is no reason why
you should question this.

You can feel me. I
will keep you safe. I will keep you
alive. I'm your messiah.



the page



to inspiration

and you would still appear, appear in
the paper
I held in my hand,

rippling waves in the pages before me,
a dorsal fin
of a shark circling my head,

watching its prey. I could touch
the page
and still feel

the rose I threw over the mahogany
box in the
November cold,

the grass covered with ice, cracking
every time
I took a step toward you.

I could feel the pain in the paper, and
I could
still feel the cold

marble, freezing my fingers. And the
etched message
on the stone could still

took hold of me the way you did.
All I had
to do was look at your

writing and feel the blood rush, feel
your breath
on my neck, feel

the fist jumping out from the page
and hitting
me in the face. I could feel it.

I could feel a thousand wars fought
and won
on your page, in

your words. I could feel your hot
breath
pushing up against

my neck, I could feel your hands taking
my shoulders,
throwing me back in the chair.

I would look at your paper and see out the
window the
masses rising, rioting in the

streets. I can feel the tide rising from
your thoughts.
What do you possess? What

have you been through, to give you
such a gift? I
look back at the page,

and I begin to feel your hand from

under the page,
from in the desk, razor

in hand, shoving up through the fiber,
slicing at the air,
trying desperately to get to me.

And I get up from my chair, walk over
to the bathroom,
almost like memorization.

I feel nothing but the drive you felt.
In the mirror,
there are cuts on my face.

the playground

I walk to the playground. I have to climb through a tiny winding path to get to it. There are branches in the path scratching my legs. They annoy me.

Maybe they wouldn't have bothered me if I were a child.

The playground is in the middle of an empty field. Children are playing, making a lot of noise. The swing set is full.

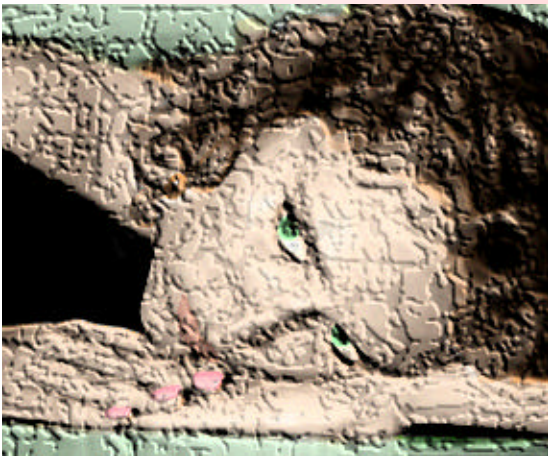
The grass around the playground is dead, probably from too many children jumping on it. There are a few sparse weeds that manage to survive the children's abuse. They climb up the sides of the equipment on the playground. You never notice the weeds, until they catch your eye once. Then you always notice them.

The paint is chipping off the monkey bars. No one is climbing on them; one child is sitting on the top of the monkey bars, and he won't let anyone else climb up on them.

Two children are yelling at each other. They are arguing over who gets to swing on the tire. Another child is crying. She said one of the boys stepped on her foot.

I turn around. I can see a few buildings beyond the trees, past the clearing. The grey one is the one where I work. I have to go back soon.

I can see part of a sign at the building. It used to say the name of the company on it, but the sign is worn and the paint is chipping. But I know what it says.



the room of the rape

For almost two years when I walked up the nine stairs,
held on to the wooden railing whose finish was worn,
I'd pass the first door on the right.
My bedroom door was closed for one year, ten months and seven days.
I slept in the den across the hall.

One morning I woke, walked into the hall
and looked at the door. I turned around,
knowing I couldn't take it anymore,
walked into the den, folded the bed back into the couch,
and then walked into the hall, squarely facing
the door of the room.

A room in my house, that I let him go in to.
But when I woke up that morning, I told myself
that I wouldn't let him stop me today.

I turned the handle of the door. I heard a snap.
I slowly pushed the door open,
slowing it down to hear the hinges creak.
The shade to the small window in the corner was drawn,
so I stepped onto the parquet floor and turned on the light.

I felt the walls jump back in fear,
fear of having to see the light again,
then rush in on me in anger.
I saw the bed sheets rustle, get kicked
and tossed to the ground again.
I tasted the sweat and I wanted to spit,
but I couldn't. Something told me
that wasn't what I was supposed to do.
My bedroom.
I saw the fists reach out from the walls
and thought of the poster I drew



of rebellion and rage
that is tucked in the back of my closet.
I felt the muscles tense behind my eyebrows
I pursed my lips
I swallowed the sweat
My bedroom.
I felt the fists punching my stomach,
grabbing my face, my arms, my hair,
pulling my legs apart.
I felt my head against the pillows again
as I tried to just push my face
into the salt and the sheets
I heard the screams I never made
echo inside me
the screams that haunted me
I closed my eyes from the pain and the light
My bedroom.
I thought of the fist, the symbol for the
communist work ethic
to do what you're told,
to disappear into society.

I opened my eyes.
The room was mine —
the sheets on the floor, the stains on the bed, the smell of Hell
and the photographs on the dresser.
I looked at the pictures
and found one of him, with his arms around me.
I picked up the frame,
ran my hand along the gilded edges.
Flakes of paint fell to the floor.
I opened the drawer of the dresser
and gently set it face down.
I turned around,
shutting off the light on my way out.
My bedroom.

the second death

the outburst of the telephone
the clamorous ring
the jostling sound
nearly threw me from my seat;

as I spoke to you
as the receiver sobbed
I tried to console you
to calm you down
without hanging up altogether.
Don't apologize for the outburst
for I don't mind helping you through.
I don't need the help myself.

No, I'm not going to go see him;
they have to ship his body to me anyway.
It doesn't matter.
He was a stranger to me then,
and he is a stranger to me now.
He is no colder than he was.

No, I don't want to say good-bye
to him:
I see no point
in saying good-bye to a man
I never said hello to.
Or I love you.
And I'm only sorry to see mother
shake as she's sipping her coffee.

I hate to see the people mourn.
He was such a good man,
it's a shame to see him go,

we'll all miss him so.
No.
They did not know
of his yells and screams
in a drunken stupor,
or his terrible indifference;
they did not know
of the stubbornness
or of the ice in his stare.

And I can't forgive him for leaving me
long before leaving this world.

Daddy,
I am not heartbroken
and I will not miss you.
I miss not having a father.
I have always missed the man
who smothers his baby daughter with love
when he comes home from work
and who loves to call me
daddy's little girl.

Father,
I will not cry for you,
for you died long ago.

there I sit



there I sit

I sit alone
separated
isolated
away from my only love
my obsession

I pull out
a fountain pen
I look
at the lines
the contours
of his face

defining
the piercing
eyes
the pointed
nose
the tender
lips

I feverishly
draw
I sketch
I capture
his image

I stare
I gaze
I memorize his every detail
but he never looks back

so I will draw
until my
fountain pen
runs dry



they called it trust

Do you remember when
it was 1:30 a.m. one rainy night
and you asked me what
I wanted to do?
I told you that I wanted
to take a bottle of champagne,
climb on to the roof of your house
and toast in the pouring rain.

You asked me why I said that.
I shrugged my shoulders flippantly
and said that it was something to do.
But I was testing you.
I was afraid to ask
if you would follow me
when I told you to trust me.

And that is why I trusted you
when you poured the champagne
and kissed my wet skin

this may sound

I don't know
this may sound silly
but every night
just before
I'm about to sleep
I think of you
and when I
turn out the light
and crawl into my
empty bed
a piece of me feels
missing
I don't know
what it is
but I feel a hole
right about where
my heart is
when I have to
lay there
night after night
all alone
when I am with you
I feel as if
I am complete
I feel as if
nothing in the
world matters
when you're
holding my hand
with your
heart near me
then I can sleep
and then I

fall into my
empty bed
and I feel the
hole again
burning through
my heart
and I wish
I didn't feel
so alone
and I wish
the hole would
just go away

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train tracks

I walk up to the train tracks. It is daylight, but the sun is behind the clouds. The whole sky is a blue-grey. The grass in the field is brown. It feels like straw. It scrapes my ankles when I walk through it.

I walk on to the rocks that surround the tracks. It is hard to walk on them. My feet keep slipping.

I look up. There are trees on the horizon. They don't look real. They look too small to be real. They look like toys.

I look at the train tracks. The wooden rails are wet, even though it hasn't rained for days. I step over onto one of the rails. I start to walk down the tracks on the rail, like it is a balance beam. I quickly lose balance and fall.

I look at the condition of the wooden rail. The edges are no longer sharp and sturdy: they are worn and soft. I see a pill bug crawling out from a crevasse in one of the rails. I choose not to get back up on the rail and try to balance. I walk along the side.

The wind picks up. I don't feel like buttoning up my coat, so I overlap the edges around my waist and hold them down. I feel the wind and hear it hiss as it hits my ear and curls around. I realize that this is the only sound I have heard there.

I look at the slats between the rails. They look like they are about to fall apart. I can't fathom that these tracks would be able to support a train. But then again, I don't remember the last time I saw a train on these tracks.

ugly house

or how a place holds a feeling

This is an ugly house. I hate the wallpaper in the spare room. Those stupid miniature rooms on the shelves in the spare room, stupid ugly miniature rooms she made, why would anyone want a box of a miniature room anyway? She takes up all the space in there, gets mad at me when I put a flower arrangement in there. I'm sleeping in the room, let me at least put something in there so I don't feel like I'm sleeping in a hotel that chose a decorator with no taste. Why does she have so much stuff anyway?? She's got a third of her jewelry and half of her clothes there, and I'm the one who sleeps in the room.

I hate the multi-colored carpet in the living room, the barrel chairs with turquoise and melon vinyl coverings. The ugly statues mom is drawn to. A statue has to be inherently ugly for her to like it, I think. The lights hanging from above the bar, the lamp shades are Harvey's Bristol Cream canisters. That mural of the 5 kids above the couch. I'm at the bottom. I look ugly. It was when I was subordinate and meek and stupid and helpless. Like now.

I hate the stained glass hangings in the kitchen windowsill. And you can see the black paint chipping off the refrigerator door so you know mom tried to cover up the turquoise. Silk flowers that look really crappy. The kitchen flowers are the worst. I hate the wood-branch-tree she decorates for any pagan season she thinks of, even if it's not pagan, let's decorate the tree anyway, no one will know the wiser. Or the fact that there are nice things in the house, like two Dali prints, but they look ugly here. Art even looks like trash in this place.

I hate the lamps hanging in front of those ugly melon colored front doors. And that wind chime hanging from the lamp in the front hallway. That rock garden in the front hallway, it used to have a working fountain in it, but I was too little when it worked, but that's okay, because I think it would be even more frightening with water running down it.

And I hate the playroom, the room i'm sitting in now, look at how cluttered it is, all the jewelry she'll never get around to selling, all the fabric for clothes she'll never make, all the exercise equipment that collects dust because she feels she can WALK her way to a perfect body. You know, she doesn't like me using the treadmill because she thinks I'll wear out the motor. What difference does it make? Books she's collected because I collect books. She wants this of mine, I owe her this, I adopted this from her... She's so petty, and no subtle hint I make makes a difference. She slams on any idea I ever have. She makes me feel I can never be creative, because it won't work out. And she wonders why I'm insecure. Don't you get it? You made me this way, I hate what you've done to me, I hate what you've become, and now I have to sit here and live with you, in this ugly house. And when I move out I'm going to still have to live with myself, with all this insecurity, with all this anger. And I'll still have the memory of this house in my mind.

victim

every day I face the wall
I must stand tall
from break of dawn
I carry on

every day I struggle with the lingering past
I had struggled, I had worked to take it fast
every day I find it difficult, impossible
to look at what we have and make it last

time to time I shed a tear
when you are near
I stop myself
I'm filled with fear

I try to carry on but it doesn't seem fair
when I feel your presence but you are not there
time to time I find it difficult, impossible
to look at how I feel and say you care

I close my eyes, I see it too
when I sleep I dream of you
when I talk your words come out
when I live I just feel blue



I can see the scene, it flashes through my mind
I can't fathom feelings of another kind
when I try I find it difficult, impossible
to search for pieces that I cannot find

I had struggled with the maze
worked a hundred days
tried to make it stop
I could not see through the haze

I hurt so many ways

wedding lost

And she sees herself in the
passenger seat at night, her fiance
beside her, and the lights seem

all too bright, and the rain seems
all too loud, like the thunder of
soldiers running across a field to

war, swept with the drunken feeling
of patriotism, charging toward their
unknown enemy. And so it happened

that night, the lights got brighter,
the car started to spin, and then
she started to dream.

And she sees herself at the
end of the church, the bridesmaids
have just walked down the

aisle, the music changes for her.
She feels swept with the euphoria
of love, and she begins to walk,

but she falls, the bouquet falling
from her hand. And in slow motion,
white roses and lilies

scatter along the aisle. And she
looks up, and the groom is gone,
and the ground is the ashes

of the house they bought together

after they were married. She
sits up, and she's at the desk at the

bank, trying to get the loan for the
house. His job is secure, we're young,
nothing could go wrong. Good thing

he wore the blue tie to the bank, and
not the red one. And she sees herself
waking up from sleep, the oxygen

pipe still under her nose, her husband
there, tie in hand, asking if she'd like
to hold their baby. But she

could have sworn she heard the
baby stop crying. And she panics.
And then she wakes up, her head is bobbing,

but now she's back, back at the
hospital, looking at the tubes running
out of her fiance's arm.

you once so confidently

I found you at the pool hall
with your excuses for friends
taking a drag from your filtered cigarette
I don't even think you inhaled

I hurled my anger at you
the flames from my eyes struck you
but your sculpted hair wasn't even singed
and you remained as cool
as you imagined yourself to be

and as I turned away
and stormed toward the swinging door
the deafening silence was broken
by a feeble cough
I looked back and saw you
and immobile emotionless statue
with beads of sweat running down your forehead

as I cocked my head
I closed my eyes
and the flames I once hurled were extinguished
as quickly as the cigarette
you once so confidently smoked



you're with me

I sit in a chair
in a lonely corridor

I'm all alone
but I see you there

You're in my thoughts

I see your face
imagine your touch

I hear your voice
but you're no place

You're in my mind

I'm all alone
but then again, no

for even when
I'm alone

You're with me