

What beautiful dreams we are.

Two virgins, tangled. It is three in the morning, and this is their intercourse, which is not sex, but just as real:

The first, lying on her side, makes a capture, a long hand, thin wrist, and pulls it in, smuggling it quickly under all her weight, rolling on her stomach to keep it near and trapped below. A triumphant smile in the dark.

The second: "That is my hand." Lying on her back, staring at ceiling or wall or darkness, with a smirk.

The first: "It is mine now. I have it."

"But it is my hand, and my wrist, and my arm. I need them." And the second tries to regain these treasures from the thief.

The first holds on tight, bringing the stolen hand close to her face, holding, cherishing, possessing. "It is had."

"You can't have it. Perhaps it has you. I have you."

July 2000

The first rolls over again, close to the second, covering the second, weighing down. "I have you. You are had."

From below, "No, *you* are had, and you love it."

"I like to be had."

"So do I."

My Indrakshi and I cannot dance well. Even on a dark night in the woods, all alone, we are strangely awkward, nervous. The trees are watching, the owls are watching. We are sticky with sweat and bug spray. The Georgia heat is as heavy as Georgia rain; even late, this late, it is burning up.

The porch is lit by flash lights and citronela candles. It is an amber light, like my stinking darkroom, only so much more diffuse, so slight. The cabin itself has no lights, no electricity, only lanterns, and few. We have the music turned up as loud as it will go and there is no one around to complain.

To "Piano by Candlelight," As Seen on TV, we step all over one another attempting a waltz, and it is perfect that way. It is so wrong. We make up our own dances, as simple as possible, add twirls and jazz hands for a "routine" we never once get all the way through without screwing up or bursting out laughing.

There is a hole in the floor I keep tripping into. We take off our shoes and do our own Swan Lake on that dusty floor. For a finale she jumps on my back and I attempt to spin around before dropping her.

April 2001

Somewhere we switch from the commercial romance music to the *Dirty Dancing* soundtrack, and we sing along, screaming; we know all the words. Somewhere someone tells me this is the most beautiful night of my life.

Somewhere someone tells me she would not be angry if I kissed her. I do not kiss her. I am a coward.

Our stringy hair falls in our faces, we laugh and sing and dance until we are worn out. I collapse on the couch inside and she falls into a chair, in the room with the fireplace, the antlers on the wall, and the lantern hanging above the table. (She wanted to take my picture lying on that table but she never did. It was dirty.)

I remind her that she promised to hypnotize me. She could hypnotize her friends at sleepovers when she was younger. She tells me to relax my toes and my ankles and my calves. She talks of steps for me to visualize myself walking down.

She gives up, saying she doesn't remember how she did it.

August 2000

Absolut hunger? Absolut lust? Absolut indecision? Absolut silence in the murky city air.

We pass back and forth my dripping Bear Bryant hat, though it won't do much good for us yet. She says she sobs on that hat now, and I am far away, in the heat, head in the oven on a pillow. It's not my only soaked-hat story these days.

Are we not still fabric sisters, in the drizzle or icicle queen tears? The purple air? I think I can still smell your hair, in my scarf.

We step into a church with colored windows and drip on the floor. From the foyer, we watch the goings-on inside. Hiding there, that holy hallway, we can't enter, we're trapped. How could we dare?

July 2000

The cold falls in sheets like the rain on our shoulders. The wet Birkenstocks under my toes are sticky goo shoes. Our hair is sopping wet in little snake strings. The mist sandblasts our pale faces, and I don't really think it could be April. In my mind, it's us versus a storm from the Arctic.

Nevermind the greyscale buildings. Nevermind the passersby with umbrellas, briefcases, newspapers tucked inside. They must know all about the protesters and the cops, the streets blocked off, why her dad gave us places not to go. I don't know. I'm practically a tourist, a fish. Still I belong, arm linked with this girl from nearby.

My hand in her pocket, hers in mine. We're shiplike. Tempest tossed but giggling along. Wet and cold, we don't really know where we go. Look for a museum, an art gallery, something static. We want to look and be forbidden to touch. We want to gaze, halfway and hard.

All buildings are similar whites and greys, with lines, with squares, heavy things. They are broken up only by startling pictures of skinny girls up high and smiling, or the next huge incarnation of Absolut vodka. Is it

Two tall girl-things - the older one one perfectly lanky and chic, the other pegged a romantic on sight - sit on a bench together in a bookstore, after having exhausted the fun of trying to appear as lesbian lovers while surveying the women's issues department. Arms linked, hips tilted toward one another - we have to stand like this, the slim one said. The long haired one would have liked to stand so close in any department and was a bit disturbed by the joke, but these chance intimacies cannot be passed up.

I imagine these young birds would look grand parading down the streets of Paris together, best friends, partners in their sensibility and silliness, whispering of hidden love affairs with the dark passersby. They'd dress simply and carry a fine umbrella. Some of the magazines piled in their laps now are French, so it makes perfect sense.

They flip through foreign fashion glossies much too quickly to pretend they could read them. They study the women in the pictures. The angular models, delicate features, roll through their heads, and yes, they feel quite ugly. Perhaps later, trying not to sleep, they'll assure one another that they are pretty. (Your eyes! Your legs! Your cheekbones!).

Extremely revealing pictures are subjects of much amazement to the younger girl, she is not accustomed to Paris Vogue. The elder is not startled, being well-aware that people are simply more naked in Europe, and also having been through these magazines before. (The rumor is now she won't touch a thing short of the *New Yorker* or *Atlantic Monthly*.)

They are there together for some time, taking advantage of the hospitality given them by the multimillion dollar corporation singularly responsible for putting out of business thousands of charming independent bookshops of a type they themselves were born to appreciate.... Then suddenly, where to go? Oh! The CD department! All is great fun for the teenaged dramatists, all is fine, all is fair in heartbreak and disillusionment. (Our one life is Japanese pop music these days.)

July 2000

When she loved me she loved me for qualities that were not mine. She loved me for the things I admired, those things I found in her. I never even knew what Vienna meant. The city is lost to her esoteric eyes. She taught me to lust and yearn and desire under a guise of marred amity.

The first year, we played false stoics from far away corners while burning from excessive vilification. Or so it seemed to me. Loving warriors were we, or separate incongruous fishers. I tried to make men of little boys I'd never laid eyes on while she wore herion (heroin?) orange eyeshadows into and out of a life I've never known.

January 2000

It was on the fourth night that I first kissed her. This moment came as the climax of a very slow crescendo, there were so many endless minutes leading up to it, as we lay there in the dark of that blue room, our hands on each other, somewhere, somewhere. So slow were our movements, to mask their obvious awkwardness, as more and more figure-eights were drawn across more and more skin, and we were covered by a tension thick as rain. How long did this calligraphic struggle to find ourselves in the correct position last? Minutes, hours, months, until the crescendo was matched by her breathing patterns, and my fingers found her lips, and her own fingers pulled me closer, to the very first taste, and I never wanted to let go.

May 2001

Months fly by like albatross on wheels and my life is changing like Georgian rain falls - so calm but so heavy (an anvil before the sound catches up). Vibrant scenes pass around me and through me unrecorded and I fear I've lost the most pivotal point in my life by not writing *all this time*. Sometimes I think I haven't lived a moment until I've scrawled it down, because my recollections are biased and incomplete with time, but I scream to you from the apex of this tree I cling to through the storm - I have seen things I never imagined. Everything has been magnified and my heart has exploded time and again. I am a new thing today.

My eyes have changed lenses and I wear a new scarf.

It was the only nice one in a rack all cheap and not-so-silky. How we laughed at buying something in the dingiest store in the mall. Then we pretended to shop and I tried on ridiculous things. You warned me, but what do I know. I'm a sucker for the Bohemian peasant look I could never pull off. They say I look best in a white tailored shirt and pleated skirt so prim and fine. I just imagine that someone may think I'm a naughty French schoolgirl on vacation from Paris. Chic and European is my new thing, haven't you heard? Though I'd rather have crumpled hair than Vidal Sassoon any day. But that one day in the mall it was grand. How we skipped

together arm in arm like the Yellow Brick Road was right there. Why did those munchkins frown at us so? I'll do my perfect Scarlet O'Hara, but I must say your cheap border state imitation is so much more endearing. I find myself unable to stop clinging to you even now. But I'll force myself to write of other things, because I know you hate me for turning everything here into a letter to you, while the real letters so seldom come.

I have hidden in pretty churches on wet days in big cities. I have screamed "Amazing Grace" while running down the beach in pitch darkness. I've sat in a coffee shop for consecutive Fridays listening to the folk singing boyfriend of some pretty girl I know. I've studied until I couldn't see straight and I could do nothing but cry. I've huddled under a blue bargain blanket in a field armed with nothing but bubbles and Cadbury creme eggs and the most beautiful girl in the world at 3 AM. I've painted canvases about truth and wrote speeches about the joys of American History. I've been kissed in the Atlantic Ocean and at a gas station. I've gotten accepted to a young writers conference in Sewanee, Tennessee. I've read the Gospels. I've seen my father for the first time in two years. I've learned what it's like to be so filled with the energy of another person you never want to eat. I've gone on a breakfast picnic behind a cemetery dressed all in white lace. I've discovered my passion

June 2000

To explore medium-sized navy polka dots on a transparently thin silk skirt, mid-calf-length:

First ponder: the way a masculine hand can rest on a feminine thigh, even lower, near the knee, even through clothes. They can be transparently thin as mentioned, or rough as old art-jeans with splatters for dots. These are the kind that aren't flattering at all, too loose in the rear due to gaunt disease and the legs just can't be narrow enough. The thickness of the waist is accentuated, when you've always wanted a waist like a sheet of paper or a drinking straw or something, anything, insignificant. Even so, yes, you're wearing them dirty for days. Still he touches her leg with such a glaringly possessive expression just shining from every blue vein, tiny hair, conspicuous bone. It is obvious in the way the thumb will rub back and forth, tiny motion, maybe in a slightly circular pattern, saying something of *I own you*, something of *I am you*, something of *I cherish you*, something of *I'll protect you*, something of *I want you, now*.

Then: the texture of the skin beneath, and how it adds to things, and the warmth, and the yearning. The way legs are for wrapping around things. And how they can be so long.

for frying squash and green tomatoes. I've bought a bikini. I've gotten my hair cut. I've eaten a clam. I've floated. I've floated. I've floated.

The art-jeans are mine, folded up in an old drawer somewhere, with my favorite art-t-shirt, with just the right combination of smeared fingerprints along the hem. The silk polka dots are children of a stranger, it is the silhouette of some skinnyprettygirl's thigh in my visage, not my own, and that hand belongs to no lover of mine, and oh how I would like to break his wrist, to smash them both into atoms, and scream to all in the theatre that my hands are like that too, only more fragile, and I have owned hands like that, worshipped hands like that, prayed both with and for hands like that.

March 2001

In a house I've never been to, full of drunk college students playing video games, beer bottles covering tables, Oriental things, paintings and books written in Chinese, I lie exhausted on a foreign sofa in crumpled clothes and wild hair and pimples on my chin.

I'd been swimming, in a freezing cold pool surrounded by ghosts of people who were once my classmates. Some were smoking and some were drinking, most were talking, and I was the only one still in the pool, floating on my back in the middle while a guy sat on the edge watching me. I thought about how James told me he could still remember how I looked floating in the Atlantic Ocean last June, in my leopard-print bra. This guy is not James, and he will probably not remember me floating, or anything else from that night. I get out of the pool, dry off on Marlon's already-damp towel, and put my clothes back on. They were crumpled, because they'd just been sitting on the ground all that time, and my hair got in such a mad state from getting wet in the pool and getting brutally harassed by Marlon for a good fifteen minutes afterwards. He scratched my head as if I were some favorite dog, as I sat huddled in an uncomfortable chair, but what did I care, with people constantly asking if I were okay, just because I was tired and didn't feel like grinning. It was midnight after all. And then the cops showed up

Pay no mind to the blue sheet hanging in the hall. You see, the bathroom door fell off its hinges. It's very posh, I think, like a beaded curtain or cucumber incense cones. Maybe we could take off all the doors that way. All but mine because I need a lock.

V. looks at my pictures and decides I am not just the girl with long hair from honors English. Comfortable yet? Are you? Are you? Here, let my roll out my soul for a futon. Black and white pictures on the walls and scarves hanging over the closet door. The messy drafting table, the broken tassel. Antique bed, saints calendar, *Gone With the Wind* poster, hardwood floors, peacock feathers. I try to look at it like someone seeing it all from a neutral perspective. Yes, this girl is righteous. Indeed, the child knows space.

My father's apartment is the same. Same black and white photos, same floors, same squares, same space. But he decorates the tall tall walls with hammers. Hammers everywhere. (Jesus was a carpenter and so was he, my daddy.) He calls my mother and me for a ride to a bar, only he doesn't tell us that. We drop him off at a Gate station because this was his direction. He says he doesn't even have 60 cents to buy stamps. We stopped our rummy game for this. In the back seat, I'm trying to hide

and we left.

So I'm lying on this guy's couch, tired, and Marlon and Ellen are there with me. Ellen's wearing a pink fairy dress, and she's sitting in the hole left my wrinkly partial fetal position, between my head and my knees. She's warm and I want to sleep. She's warm and she strokes my hair, like she doesn't have enough problems of her own to take a second to make me feel safe in a strange Oriental drunken house where I shouldn't be, and Marlon is unhappy and uncomfortable and I don't even care because Ellen's close to me and playing with my hair and I'm almost asleep. The boy who belongs to the house, Ellen's friend, also tipsy and Chinese, sits on the other couch and he's mumbling about how he should take pictures of us and sell them on the internet, it's so *erotic* our being close like that. And Ellen says "Katharine has a boyfriend."

June 2001

behind my dusty blue camisole. Shrink, I tell my body, but she won't listen. He's running with the dogs, he says. He's fucking himself up. Doesn't even ask that we pardon his French. (When I was little I told him it wasn't French, it was bad English. He said he guessed I was right and laughed.)

A pile of sticks and chemicals, a mind that was once filled with philosophy now a tattered tortured rag and I don't know whether he's a wreck or he's a wreck. This is my blood, these are my roots. This is my art. Will my life follow his. He tells me to type up his resume without dates because everything is so scattered. Didn't I say I was nonlinear?

Didn't I, just a few months ago? I'm getting his nose too, his knees, and his walk. Vagabond. Bum. Free-spirit? Broken. He used to eat dirt. Said he couldn't get enough.

June 2000

As I lay there, my heart beat frantically, three dimensionally, under my skin, as if a thousand little boys with feathers in their hair and scowls across their faces beat drums within me, in my sinuses, along my arms, in the inners of every fold and crease. With each beat the temperature seemed to rise a degree, and I could feel the pink in my feet and the pink in my neck surrounding my body in ribbons. I could not have gotten up or I'd have fallen down from the sudden lack of pressure. Yes, and the walls of my face seemed to cave in on me, but it was a tiny place, such a tiny protective space, my shell had become, and this is what I saw, and this is what I dreamed behind my eyelids, hot, red, thin, illuminated, much like a hand in the dark with a flashlight shining through.

My lover swims, quite literally, swims, into me. Freestyle, indeed, one hand in front of the other, as if it were the obvious thing to do, as if my body cavity were the safest place to hide. Centimeter by centimeter, the slow advance, membranes penetrated through one by one, whether by diffusion or osmosis you slip between the cracks. My organs are brushed aside as if made of clouds or tulle, and vessels cling like seaweed, strangling those fingers that slink down my sides from the inside, outlining those same figure eights I might have fashioned along someone else's skin. I imagine the pulsing arteries are fun to poke at,

My space, which hovers around me like a needy lover or a lapdog without a home, seems to have morphed, transposed, mutated into a size both too large and too small - I see the air (wave particles of light reflect refract oh my, how the sun does make prism colors on the snow) around me as turgid plant cells, filled with emptiness, space, instead of water, H₂O. These more regular honeycombs press hard against me, against one another, jostling for domain perhaps (one might say) yet each compartment is itself a tiny house, cramped, and I envision myself all tangled in my legs (god they are long), wrists bent back in funny not awkward angles (what strange things you do with your hands!). In each, I try to press outward with those hands, knees, hips, all strung together, to exert my presence, inside, or break free. Little red Katharines like disks in *Drosophila* eyes - trying to be both within my body (still foreign, but less) and in my sphere of influence all at once, I am everyone, nowhere, continuous, fractals of me. The sphere is everywhere I can see and some places I cannot, I am disoriented in the bigness of it all (no other hips, no other hands) while still mangled, twisted, into and upon myself, in those floating, pushing, shoving balloons. You see the the dilemma, which is real.

make a yawn in my pounding pulse, still raising the mercury as my temples become moist. I start to fade out into some tropical bliss, as a sun worshipper in California might, with her tiny purple bikini and brown brown stomach. The heat soaks through me from the outside air as I am filled completely from the inside, until the entire body of another stretches out inside my own, and another heart beats there, overlapping systole and diastole and systole and diastole until all is too blurred to differentiate, nothing remains but a constant hum, and the very capillaries become tangled, and our skins make a double grocery bag, and our eyes see in the same direction, in the same shades and tints, the same hues.

And I find I am shaking terribly, involuntarily, as if this were all real, and not just an illusion sleeping between thin sheets.

March 2001

My room itself, immaculately organized by my mother in fits of worry I am sure, in actuality quite cottage-like with shades and shadows of the man who would give his daughters treasure maps and leaves then refuse to take his drugs and get manic to the point of imprisonment, seems as immense these days as some French palace or dungeon, perhaps the Atlantic, waving at the moon (chasing it down watery blue corn fields, I know, I know, gravity but no end to the search). We may attribute, quite easily, the amazement of my mind, my pores, at such whitespace (which is another word for empty, I won't use void, no) once familiar and filled with my own scent, and the final vibrations of a sentence passing through, uttered to my mother or to Mozart streaming in or to some other player in this off-key little opera, in my little acceptable Southern drawl, to my having been close to one who would call me beautiful in multiplicity *for days*.

Yes, this really happened, in the living air, and now I cannot stand to be alone in my hull, my unfilled shell, by myself in my *life*. Yes, this really happened, as sure as I spent those days in a rush - In a rush I am surrounded in you, being polite to your family, folding my clothes, getting snow in my boots, watching you watch me put on my makeup, explaining how we kiss like a symphony, wearing fishnet stockings into a

charming hotel (Alas, I worried about looking professional, and gosh was it funny when we couldn't get the door open, and yes, it was oh so "with fervor," happy new year!), looking through your boxes and boxes of old things at the farm, completely enraptured, criticizing your tacky christmas tree with its ornaments you made before I was born, wearing your hat, sleeping in your arms, riding through all those odd little Christmas-card towns. Yes, as sure as from this I had to walk away and to appear unharmed when faced with the reality of its being over, with hardly any proof that it was no fairy tale. Only a pearl necklace and some odd pictures of a shadowy figure examining a gun next to a window with lace curtains and light flooding in. The world will not acknowledge what has taken place, no one else knows everything has changed - and it has nothing to do with sex.

"Nothing is as clear as black and white" whispers the conscience of our hectic world as day falls to night again and again, yet in our yellow studio with its watery flowers and mutant deer and vaginal ears of corn, in a cramped little world of suitcases and socks and cat hair all over the place, on our tiny air mattress, it actually is that clear - we know I am black and you are white and together we are beauty. It is enough, entirely enough, and for once things are genuinely okay. *Andante* I sit next to you,

breath, to be in a strange place yet not afraid. It is so urgent on my mind to know, exactly, what it was like, all of it. I don't trust myself even to keep my own memories, for fear they will tarnish or yellow or simply fly away, while I sit here again in my room and my senses fall back into a state of atrophy, the plug is pulled, yanked out to put it bluntly, and the little transparent filaments of the fiber optic ball will no longer glow pink and yellow and green when touched. I find myself quite frantic in light of my past which grows as every nanosecond races away. I have never been so terrified of forgetting. Where will all those words, kisses, glances, moments go? Will they simply melt away with the snow, or will you keep them locked up for me and promise to know what they all meant, in case I don't? *Allegro vivo*.

Still I am slipping, with a pink scarf (#2) wound tightly around my neck for security, help in my short-haired endeavors into the the world of children walking to and fro, speaking yet saying nothing (pity those who do not get to speak to me of Important Things. ha!). And I have the gall to think them all sick, my relatives, my peers, only because they sicken me, I, who sees too much, in the voice of my sister asking me if she smells like pot before going to Christmas dinner, in the voice of my grandfather telling my other sister (lovely daughter of a ballerina) she

holding your hand, and your mother frowns at me as if I've stolen something from her and it's all the worse because I'm only seventeen. (She thought I was eighteen, but no, only seventeen, it rings in my ears these days, seventeen seventeen. I wonder if my hands move like those of a seventeen year old and my heart beats in a seventeenish way. Lolita wasn't a nymphet anymore by the time she turned seventeen; she was all washed up, so to speak. Did you really call me that, or did I imagine it?. Lolita. Seventeen. I have crude ideas about seventeen; seventeen is such a pornographic age. Falsely poetic, I am imagining "do I love like a seventeen year old, do I breathe like a seventeen year old, do I uncurl my spine like a seventeen year old" when all I really mean is "do I fuck like a seventeen year old"... and it has nothing to do with sex, yet I wonder, being silly, ridiculous, and unkind. *Maestoso?*)

Folly, folly, the making of images in my head, in my hand (between fingers, tracing down, down), on paper (brisk, stark, white), in air (mine). I relate to the sun and think always of the oddness in people, the beauty, of my head belonging always on your bare shoulder. Splice together the good lines, but I can think of nothing else. How *did* I feel? How did I *really* feel? I want to know myself, what it is like, to be me, and to be near someone I love, to be in a new adventure story with every

"breathes sensuality," in the voice of my teacher asking me to sit down before I'll have to listen to a lecture on what pearls from a twenty-two year old man mean, in the voice of a classmate. My father is truly sick, they say (I will always condemn), for his aesthetic tendencies are all he has, and it terrifies me for thinking the same things, for inventing all hours away, trying to be art. Art is intrinsic, like sitting in a chair reading a book, or nights and days on end staring into space (void, sigh) not seeing, until that moment, one instant when eyes open and see that work is done, you are finished, not you, I, I am finished, my sleep, my meditation, my moment of creation, my art has lived, and has touched you, yes, the real you, to be sure.

To the very end, he moves his hands as if their very positions each mean something, each freeze-frame a letter, a word, as they glide along my sides, over curves, in hollows, a Zen landscape in skin, he is narrating to me a tale, the tale of his life, the story of my own. Or he is reading the future in lines and folds not yet there. Intense and poised, I said. Beautiful, I said. I will have them, I said. I will worship them, I said. I will cry for them. For them, for you, it is all you, and I am so amazed. Your hands, with their signs, codes, enigmas. Your eyes, your throat, your chest, your heartbeat, your breath, oh the way you look at me. Cut

this scene into little squares of a graph - a finger here, my thigh, your bones, bones, bones, and skin like a garment, so thin, of silk or acrylic blend, of agony, pain, tremors. You shake. I dizzy in your presence and want to lie down, lie down, down, kiss you, until it all stops, until we are in each other content, and that will always be enough.

January 2001

As I stood waiting in the airport I ran over and over in my head these dreams I had been having, so many dreams over and over the two nights previous, and the second you walked off of that plane I wanted to create all those dreams, dreams that had forced me to get out of bed in the middle of the night. I wanted to tell you to do everything you had wished you could do to me, with me, in all those months since I had last seen you. And yet when you did arrive everything changed, and I felt meek and uncomfortable, and I cursed myself as we walked around Savannah, so oddly hand in hand, like we did not know what to make of one another. You said the same things over and over in the car when we left the airport, these things that meant nothing, and I laughed that fake laugh and curled up inside myself and could think only that I wanted very much for you to suddenly turn to me and say "I want to fuck you," and I hated my lack of courage to say it myself. I could not be genuine until I felt like that point had been made. This is how I view repression, it is very much the thing that made me unable to say that, right then, when you walked off the plane, even when I imagined that every aspect of my posture must have screamed it. (That part, of course, is only a dream.)

I am a body like a Navajo blanket. I want you wrapped up inside, giving me shape.

(Alone, I cannot relate these things which have happened to us, because they are too beautiful, and I have decided I hate words. I am afraid of not writing them down; I feel like that is what I should be doing now. Starting from the beginning, every thing. But I cannot, and I wish you would do it for me. Put my hands in yours and make the words come. I need help.)

I am surprised by my own sexual desire, by the reality and intensity of it. It shocks me, that this want is not a thing of dreams and fantasies, or rather that those fantasies have so much substance, are so much who I am. I said to you, you are so much nicer to me in real life than in my dreams. I felt such relief in expressing that, even in such a modest and vague way. I felt I had attempted, at least, to bring together two worlds. I did something I had been previously unable to do.

In a way, it is the same thing that keeps me from voicing my desires, even when they are quite specific. In a way, it is very separate, because as you said, I want these things done *to* me, and that is a huge part of it. I want it to be your choice. I wonder if this is too idealistic an outlook. At the same time I believe that our wants, sexually, must converge, just because it would be fitting with everything else about our relationship. I am so excited with thoughts that things will only get better and better. That amazes me, that it is even possible. And somehow I know that I will never cease to be amazed.

All the same there are so many things I want to be able to say to you, and there are many things I feel I have no capacity to say. There are feelings I want to share with you that I could not even begin to explain to myself, could never put into words (I am limited, in that respect), unless perhaps I was extremely intoxicated. Sometimes I feel intoxicated when I am with you; I feel more alive, like the air that was once simply there is instead doing some sort of ballet dance and massaging my skin and screaming at me, daring me to move, all at once.

I want you to know how I felt when you tied that ribbon around my wrists.

Love is sitting in the bathroom tub reading the *Calvin and Hobbes Tenth Anniversary Book* while your naked girlfriend holds her head in the toilet until two AM, as if maybe she can escape the spinning world after the fashion of an ostrich. Since you stopped handing her fresh toilet paper to break the unending rubber chain of spit coming out of the corner of her mouth, linking her to the toilet bowl, you don't have much to do. She tries to break the spit-chain by rubbing her mouth against the toilet seat every once in a while, but mostly just stares blurry-eyed at her stir-fry dinner.

You ask to go in the other room, but she thinks she might die if you're not there. You stay. She's on her period and bleeding all over the floor. You say "we'll have to clean up the bathroom tomorrow." You touch her arms, folded about the top of the bowl, around her descending head. This makes her dizzy. You tell her she's not as bad off as before, but the vodka is a bad idea. Maybe we'll cook with it.

On her left thigh, there are three little band-aids in a row, covering the gaping mouth of exposed flesh from where she rolled over unto the tip of the curved knife you used to cut the green nylon three-ply cord you

June 2001

used to tie her legs to the bedpost while you fucked. Her ankles still have rope tied around them.

The sex was great. Too bad she cut herself and started puking before you could orgasm. Her ass is covered with menstrual blood. Her eyelids are all saggy. She's got puke on her hands. She keeps saying she'll die.

You say "You'll be fine."

You say "I love you."

She's too drunk to reply, too dizzy to say thank you, though I'm sorry is manageable and frequent.

You say "It's alright."

How odd it seemed that out of eight girls my age, I was the only one who'd ever taken nude photos of herself. When I was the only "I have," someone asked if I sold them.

October 2002

July 2000

At times today I have thought to myself, “Katharine, you are alive.” There is a nice inner laugh following such declarations; they strike me as heavy and hilarious. Once, I said “Katharine, you are in love,” because it had never before occurred to me to use those exact words (they seem reserved for shooting stars, girls who sigh like willow trees, people in black and white with just enough contrast at every given moment to seem philosophical and French). To this my little post-synaptic response was only “yes.” Like all internal dialogue, it was filled with drama and over-truth. Of course, I have always been in love. I may not have always been alive, and that is what makes them weigh down on my chest, those silent words, causing me to giggle a bit insecurely, a bit too much like someone must be watching.

January 2001

For days after the attack, Greenwich Village was silent. They cut us off from the rest of the world, as if 14th street were the dividing line between that which was real and that which was surreal, the hair that divides sanity and madness. Those of us who stayed smelled the smoke of Ground Zero in a quiet solitude. We gazed at our neighbors over their facemasks and scarves; occasionally, we even smiled understanding half-smiles, but we no longer knew one another, just as we no longer knew ourselves, and we no longer knew our world. I walked along Broadway with my friends as they photographed the dust cloud, standing in the center of the huge street abandoned even by the caravans of yellow cabs.

I began to see my yesterdays as if they were love poems, lost in the mail and only partly remembered, in broken metaphors. In a sense, I felt more in love than I ever have, despite everything. Before it happened, I told my new friends or acquaintances that I hadn't had sex since June, and I suppose they pretended to be shocked. I was the girl sitting on the floor of the smoke-filled jazz club waiting for the 3 am set to begin. I was the girl waiting for the moment when all awkwardness fades away and the entire room — musicians, subdued drunkards, sleepy college students, bricks and old photographs on the wall — begins to blur into

To be alive and trembling under the gravity of all times near and far is to be spinning in so many directions at once it seems that we are sitting quite still. I can see my heartbeat looking at my skin and it is too thin to hold in frantic force beating down the invisible walls crashing through door by door. I do not feel that I am spinning, but I am. The universe is a circus and I'm not even dizzy, just tired, physically relieved tonight, satisfied for the second. I'd state a formula but that may be to blunt, and I am slight of hand, slight of hint.

A hand? Give me yours. I miss a hand to claim, my own are not enough and I'd so like to be rid of them. But yes, give me yours and I will treasure it, press it to my cheek, kiss your fingertips one by one for hours, hours, and never ever let go. I won't fall down from the endless twirl if you steady me one of these long centuries, while I explode and die out and invert all the darkness to weight. I was not meant for lightness, I give my light to you.

These is no day on the sun, I say, though others may disagree. My eyes hurt.

November 2000

one floating melody. We all tapped our feet or swayed our shoulders or nodded our heads or sat perfectly still as the music invaded our negative space, and when we glanced at one another in the dark we felt as if we must have known each other on some level where it hardly mattered that we neither knew one another's names nor spoke the same language nor read the same poetry. We were fluent in listening and thought and almost-thought and non-thought: we were all in love.

I remember, before I came here, my naked body straight and flat against tightly woven hotel carpet, my neck held in place between his ankles. That was my love. That was June and this is September. Sometime between those two months saw my mother tearfully walking down to the subway station, leaving me alone in Greenwich Village; sometime between those two months everything changed.

Still, here I remain, in New York City, where buildings fall down and thousands of people die so close by that I smell the smoke of the explosion for days. There he remains, 2000 miles away, thinking about it all too much. Nothing is as simple as a hanger on a doorknob in April, a picture he sent me with others, showing me his surroundings as they were and as I imagine they still remain. There is no appreciating quiet

beauty in a war zone, and no one really feels right about going to a jazz club in “a time like this”. Simplicity seems lost, another casualty in what everyone seems to refer to as “the tragedy, “ but I am still in love.

September 2001

queens, and so easily mocked.

Yet how am I to prove myself, how am I to live defiantly, without even one piercing, and not wearing my fishnets very often. I am a “nice Southern girl,” and I want to be laced into my corset, vengefully and without sympathy. Also, I want to lace myself, and stare in the mirror, simply, easily, without thought of sex but only long beautiful strings and x-es like heavy black stitching in my skin, a torn white sheet ready to be laundered. (I join a cult for the whoring off of pretty imagery.)

May 2001

Again, don't forget, lovely image: crushing blackberries against skin of lover, drawing pictures in red juice.)

This myth of commitment seduces me day by day, and I wonder if the rules were whispered in my ear as I was but an embryo wrapped in aluminum foil, ready to be microwaved, to explode the world. Just as I marvel at myself, when I can find the idea of folding socks enticing, or even changing my name, or even being a trophy, or even being *the good one* who gets cheated on but is still loved and pitied. It doesn't seem to make sense that in this day of liberation liberation liberation and freedom to fuck it all that I might still want the old-fashioned subservient role so many bitches and goddesses alike have thrown off, fodder for ravens and whales. I never grew up in sit-com normalcy, my mother is funny in a Woody Allen way, yet still she makes good soup and kept me from dying for years I do not even have color memories of. I know my worth in all its tints and shades and hues, and still I crave objectification as much as I eroticise promises and lies. I can't say I understand. I suppose I could chalk it all up to being a girl. Not a woman, though I may be, but there is something different about being a girl; it's too much a social class, a political state. They tell us we should scream, and that we are all character actors, slaves to our hormonal curvatures, and drama

I cannot know my desire to be hurt by you, which strains me and my heart near to laughter. My wanting is as deep as my thoughts are subtle, and my body is frightfully calm.

These sensations I cover with skin and hide behind my eyes and caress with too much dignity. I could never scream or sigh or moan or smile enough. Pain is heavier than pleasure, but much easier to digest. I want neither to overcome nor to ignore either. I want simply to accept them, fluid as my state of mind, syrupy as our elixirs. They are but two more ropes that bind us.

Forbidden from dissection is my graphic love letter to you, which I write with every bend of a wrist, elongation of a limb. I fold my extremities in knots and paint postmodern flourishes through the air, I balance like a stork in a sandstorm.

Call it pretty or call it pornographic. For me it is both, though I am never up for ridicule; I remain oddly too serene in my displays. But what have I beyond this body, save all the meaningless words, half obscured? I do only what I can, seamlessly. To be sincere is to be nearly grotesque. In this shell, I am both.

I worship my bruises so, I adore them, even accidental as they are. But no, this is no call for brutality. I want only to contain you, and whether you are fucking me or stabbing me, gazing past my eyes into forever, stroking my hair or hiding your face against my lightly thudding heart, I receive from you that which is most potent and most real.

I take with explosions all pain, sufferings, and desires, and loves. These ghosts and their manifestations hold you as do my arms. I surround them also in all oceans of calm, all shades of still-life. We will float away and I will have won, lightly. It is a small thing, it is all I can do.

January 2002

This vertigo consumes me, sucks my essence away, your mouth on my breast; yes, I was dizzy then too. Too much to eat, too little, other nourishment, farther inside. It's all circling around in my head. Oh why can't I vomit? I want to throw away all these impurities that keep me from seeing my thoughts as they float by. I feel sick now and it brings on ghosts of pleasure. The past. Why commit it all to the past so it fades faster and I begin to forget all intensity? It was all intensity, an unending circuit from you to me back to you back to me till it was impossible to tell where in its orbit the impulse situated itself. Impulse, circuit, it was electric, so electric. Touching hands like touching wires and I could have vomited then too from the jolt. Some strange flip of muscle - like when slowly tracing one nail down my torso I can't help but spasm as the string meets that strange spot near the hip. Or is there some magnetic field around you - I enter and every cell wants to dance, twirl, around and around till the room spins and I can't see your face for my eyelids are called down to calm me. Black icebergs, no, what do I see? A line that stretches before me, on and on?

I want to be smothered in the weight of you, my body blotted out my yours, come over, come over to my side, protect me from the air. Press me down against all that is mine and oh how I'd love you for the

We are playing Scrabble with my mother and little brother, but for some reason they have both left the room. We sit across from one another at the card table. You lean in and tell me I am beautiful. I say thank you.

June 2001

pressure. How I wanted something that spoke more of hunger. I was starving myself and I'd forget I had hands at all. Those hands could be used for pulling but laid flat limp by my sides, not remembered in the haste to tell you so much in so little time, or lost in you hair from time to time. I told you you were a beautiful thing. It was the best I could do at the time.

(My father told me that he once dreamt of a pearl, some floating diamond-stars, a storm closing in from all sides. The pearl represented a woman and he had to protect her. Then he couldn't get the image out of his head for years, *years*. So he draws the simple illustration in his Christ-poetry manuscript. Says "I bet you didn't know I could draw", kneels on the floor to show me, says don't read anything. Stupid poems, ten years, he can't remember when his mother died. He looks wired, a quick quick shaking. Oh how he shook at her funeral. That made me cry so much more than her death itself. And I remember when he called my mother and told her, how she slid down the wall till seated in a doorway, crying. Oh Joe. I caressed her hair and went back to sleep. The next morning he came to tell me. No more Ginny. How? She shot herself. Why? He shook then too, oh how he shook. He didn't know. I took the glass elephants down from the shelf in my room and turned them over

in my hands. Clasp them hard, this is what the grieving granddaughter should do.)

Your hands shook too. The first night? It terrified me so. Why? Did I ask why? Did you tell me? I wanted to clasp those hands to my chest till they were still, still like me. I am still through all the shock of it, though I feel as if the world is being tossed against a wall, everything I know streaming out into you. All that you feel I breathe in, till high from it, floating. I touch my hand to my face repeatedly, a pattern a pattern, to make sure I'm still there, I can still move my limbs. Never so calm, not in my entire existence had that happened so fully, and it was you, it was you. My skin on fire, yet I felt nothing. Could you tell I was a gypsy then? Is that what you mistook for enlightenment?

July 2000

You said I didn't look at you enough, but you didn't know how hard it was. A childhood just isn't complete without Spanish moss, I said, and you said Georgians have *more horizontal* eyes from squinting so much in the sun. I said ants were evil and you told me not to kill them.

My wood grains are admirable, just like your pillowy fingertips. You drew all over me, and I smeared it.

I'm always doing things like that.

June 1999

He punched me in the jaw, hard enough to knock me down. I chased him through the wheat field, screaming, until I collapsed in the dirt.

I came back to the tent and we had sex.

June 2002

I am cold in my house. *I am cold in my house.*

(In my house, in my room, in my space, in my skin, in my cells I am ice and a vanilla bean speck, a nucleus which has died somehow, or even a star. My compassion is endless, while my warmth runs negative.)

"Why do I have to *be here* this summer?"

"Because this is where you live."

"Because this is where I live?... I live in my head."

"Well, I guess we all do... To a certain extent."

I was crying, my head against her side, on the dirty tan blanket she read under. I had been crying all day, and it took all the courage I could invoke to climb those stairs, dragging my heavy eyes to look at her, my mother, now so foreign from my binary perspective; I was so afraid. She didn't know what to tell me, and I just wanted to say "you still love me, don't you?" (Question Number One: Can a mother love a daughter who gets fucked on the floor of some generic Hampton Inn hotel room and tells her she was at Media Play until 1 am the same way she loves a daughter who wins the English department award and National Merit Scholarships and studies biology diligently for hours and hours?) but

instead I said I needed a hug and that I would be so miserable. And she was still, in a daze, so like me, and I felt I was killing her, and went back downstairs.

I sat down again on my own bed and he walked up to me, comfortable, familiar, warm; he stood there and held my head against him as I cried and cried and cried. He stroked my hair and I sobbed, and it had been that way forever, and I said again and again that I didn't know, and he said he needed his keys, and finally I gave them to him.

And he left. And I kept crying.

(Eventually, I stopped. And I remember telling my thoughts in words and my feelings in touch and kisses and screams, and knowing, without doubt, that another *whole person* really exists in this white thin world of paper Katharine-perceptions stapled together so roughly and unprecisely and slightly torn. Being overcome, so happy it cannot be thought of, so real and so alive, so very much myself, pressed against a wall, in the shower or in the rain, so grateful. Realizing, for the first time, what it really means to love someone else more than myself, and how the tears kept flowing, and my body became nothing but an extension of my

June 2001

Was it a cavern or a cave packed with ice from which this knife this dagger was thrust? It is colder than the sweat on my lip, colder than the wound now is hot. This freezing is beyond water, beyond ice. Is it liquid nitrogen or swamp fog from Antarctica? Where do things come from in such degrees and such losses? Against the skin of my thighs it traces circles, ellipses spiraling spiraling nearer to inside. Everything becomes numb almost almost hard as the tip draws in deeper.

Without explosion, I know I'm being cut in two halves, exposing my lack of symmetry and it is like a seam being ripped out. I see the tiny pink laces in my mind as I look up up up to the white expanse of ceiling with those beads of hot oil and icicles forming. Was the axis always drawn? Was the line through the chest?

Could I see it in those x-rays I develop in the black black black. I forgot to turn the red light on and it's pitch today, but I'm going through the motions. Why do I need my eyes? A knife or a stream of ice water, it's cutting me in two. I can feel it like a lightening bolt all the way to my scalp. I can visualize colors but this is none of them. Even white is too dark and clear is not real.

emotion, and I could never see myself as anything but beautiful, and so much a girl, and so much in love.)

When this is over, will I sprout new appendages like a worm and live forever on as two? (I am like a worm in some ways.) Will my guts and my air and my vertebrae just clink down on the tiles? Or will I be sewn back together in thick black thread, to leave me forever in a pattern of crosshatch x's?

Which part of my mind goes right and which left I cannot tell. I'm too cold and every hair is brittle and my nipples stand erect. Soon no longer a pair. My breathing is shallow and quick. I can think myself to a castle in a black velvet dress. It's slowing, my heart. Ready for the blade. Oh don't let my secrets out with the locusts and spiders. They would be minute and alone thrown for a loop all over this sweaty sticky room.

June 2000

It's morning, damp and stinky from wet pollen. Curly hair and crusty eyes. He's back to reciting poetry in German. I'm hot from tossing and turning in my disgusting green blanket. I lay listlessly, yearning for truth, and can find nothing but animals and trees. Crying, I manage to get out that I feel like an ant walking in circles in a glass bowl, not understanding.

Last night: Everything feels fake, and I continue the internal debate. It occurs to me that the quickest way to a truthful assessment of myself might be to simply stop lying.

I do lie, continuously, for he is always asking if I am okay and what I am thinking, and I always mutter yes or make up something about the noises around me or a plant or something. Out of consideration for his mental state, I tell myself, for he is a terrible depressive. But if I did tell him how scared I am, how lonely, how I think we are so far beyond lost, perhaps maybe even if we could not have a good relationship, we could have a true one.

For now, I look at his skin and my own and we are transparent, worse than rabbits, and we do not say things on our minds. The constant

I'm pregnant. Two pink lines. My heart rate is on the very end of the "+" side of the chart, reserved for people about to die of heart attacks I think, but I weigh less than I have in months, according to the blood-pressure machine at the grocery store where we bought the test. I have anxiety and altitude sickness, and an embryo beginning to form inside of me.

I'm pregnant. The very words just make my jaw tremble.

chorus of "what are you thinking?" is so ironic, cutting. It is as if there is an unwritten law saying that as punishment for our crimes we shall never again know these very basic things about one another, we who were once so intimate.

It occurs to me later than all of it is pointless rubbish, that nothing will change, and really I just want to have sex. For there is simply no saying that my body touching his body can be false or untrue; this is beyond words and ideas and these other transient things.

I rubbed his back for a while and he made no response. I finally just masturbated for a long, long time.

June 2002

What's a pimento?
Why, they are those Red Things inside olives.
Yes, but what *are* they?

In El Paso, we had one of those El Paso fights. I would not call them fights at that point, but clashes of tears. He walked away from the tent, leaving me inside hurling my guts through my eyes onto my hands. I looked out the door, and he was standing in the strip of light between the lanes of the Interstate.

The overpass was divided. We lived under one side, in a low-ceilinged tunnel of cement, scattered with dust and junk food wrappers and broken glass. The walls were spray painted with the names of Mexican gangsters. We had to walk in there bent double, and were forever hitting our heads. It was shaded and cold, and wind tunnels formed often, nearly knocking over the tent.

In the middle, though, between the lanes of traffic going one way, and the lanes of traffic going the other way, there was a break in the overpass and one could stand all the way up. He was there, doing pull-ups onto one side of the street, the light streaming down.

When I looked again, he was bent over, holding his hands together, like he was praying, praying very hard, with the light of heaven shining on him. I went to him and he was crying, wretchedly, mumbling. He didn't

I put it into one of the patterns I'd already started, and he shook his head and gave it back to me.

When I placed it next to his pebble, he nodded yes, as if I had solved a difficult equation. I chose the next stone and reverently laid it to rest in the exact center of his open, cushioned palm. He looked at it hard; he wasn't wearing his glasses.

As we went on, he'd lean over, his face nearly touching the ground, to examine the pattern in progress, and sit back up, looking alternately hopeful or certain as he laid his piece of the puzzle.

So it went, the rite of passage, a ritual so solemn and humble it may have been deemed religious. And by the time the design was finished, we were not crying anymore.

cry much those days, only got angry and punched the concrete floor so his knuckles bled and scarred. I was touched, and he was rocking back and forth, so I grabbed him and rocked along, away and away.

He said he didn't want to be evil. I held him, and we stayed that way, rocking in the sun between the two sides of the overpass, with the cars blurring by overhead.

I started making shapes with pebbles and shards of glass and little metal circles and lines and colors of little tiny things there on the concrete floor. It went on, and there was a cross I made, and a square, and they were intricate and they didn't blow away with the dust.

Slowly and deliberately, I placed a pebble into his damp pink palm. I closed his fist around it, and moved his fist toward his chest. He opened his hand and looked at it, picked it up and held it up to the sun, learning it's secret. With much care, he placed it gently on the grey floor in front of him.

He searched the nearest little pile for a stone or broken glass dot, found the perfect one, examined it, and put it firmly into my hand.

A house of glass or of cards? No, it's only a house, but older than most. It's very green here; it's just stopped raining and the sky looks like Italy. There are flowers; there are tall, tall trees. It's fairytale but very clear, so sharp for her. When she turns her head to look at this house, at the garden, at the tree, it's like she's cleaned some stray dust from her pupils and can finally see what she's missed for years. Ancient or polished, everything is here. Dirt that looks like tiny fine jewels and weeds that look like ladders to the sun. For him, an old house in the woods, not a castle, not a vision, not much.

My dear, why did you bring me here?

So you could see what type of air I breathe best.

Must you breath air, my dear, like us all?

I am as human as you. This is where I was born.

They wrapped you in indigo here, my dear? In the rough?

They did, and the beds were all moved outside for the summer that year. Mosquito netting blowing in the wind. You'd think it were a wedding party, my mother told me.

All the beds outside? You'd think it were an orgy, not a wedding, my dear. Your mother wasn't of this world either, you know - I doubt she ever breathed air.

Oh she did and I heard her, time and again. A slow rhythm - slowed than mine, even. She knew calm by heart.

Did you swing with her there in that tree, my dear? The ropes are near rotted through.

Yes, we used the swing as our launch pad night by night, when my hair was long and we wore the flimsy flower-print skirts.

And where did you fly off to, my dear, on those night so long ago? I bet you danced on the moon.

I sit up and ask if I can see the ultrasound picture. It doesn't look like a lifeless blob of cells; it looks like an ultrasound picture. The nurse points out the head, the tail, the "beginnings of extremities," but it's all obvious.

No, the moon was too cold and we hated it. We do breathe, I told you. We went to Florida, the Keys. We sat on the beaches and built massive sand sculptures that didn't look like a thing.

No need to look like a thing, when you're not a thing, I suppose. Just like you don't have to breathe for my sake, my dear. It must be tiring.

Don't call me transcendent and don't look at me that way. I brought you here to prove you wrong.

July 2000 (fiction)

"She has been in despair so often she has train tracks across her face," says my mother.

"She sees the value both in sadness and in happiness, and revels in intensity and loss of control," says my lover.

Sleepy, sleepy. I want to curl up and submerge. I will sleep for a year or two and wake up someplace with calm lighting (peach sky) and birds that purr. You'll crawl up behind me and rub my back and say everything that was once tinted is now translucent again. For the slightest moment I'll look into your eyes, finding them the same as always. We'll lean on each other there, and just breathe, just breathe. Violin air.

I'd kiss you just for being there.

I'm just sitting here on my bed. My hair's wet and it needs a trim. My fingernail polish is chipped. I have a string around my left wrist. My computer sits on my bare legs and I'm wearing a shirt from California I've had for many years. My eyes burn a little. I should turn off the light.

March 2000

Truly it's of little use trying to dissect the situation, as he did with his fingers for Venn diagrams – after you did this, we should have been apart like this, and instead we're together like this, and now we can't figure out the right way to get like this due to everything that happened when we were like this.

Obtaining a doctorate in the science of broken relationships wouldn't do a thing to help anyone get out of one.

Of course it's all wrong. Of course it'd be better if we'd done A, B, C, D.

The true mark of fucked-upness in non-platonic relationships isn't the ignorant refusal to believe that things are bad, it's the perfect clarity and misery that come with knowing fully well how bad things are, how much worse they're going to get, and not doing a thing about it.

July 2002

My lover carried a slip of paper with "I want you" written on it in big black marker, my handwriting cursive and shaky from the wheels below. He carried it until it fell apart, He even carried the pieces for a while. They're lost now, I haven't seen them.

I wrote "I want you" and I wrote him a letter, and I thought to myself that he might forgive me for being a person if I wrote to him every day.

How splendid it was, when I wrote that treatise after I lost my virginity on the yellow blow-up bed. Where are all the good things?

All adoration lives forever, every word still lives, with the same bubble spaces, the same knots in my stomach. Falling in love and falling out of it are much the same.

May 2002

In this brightly lit and empty room I try to write our stories without you. I listen to Jewish opera and read about the fictionalized love affairs of others.

Over and over I see myself screaming at you with teary eyes – "maybe it wasn't a coincidence... that very month" and all of it, I see your hand striking me, see the fist balled up at your side before you let loose that animal on my cheek. I saw none of this at the time, as I stood there. I saw your eyes and the golden wheat around me, the stalks breaking as I fell into them, curling up into a puddle of punched girl. I replay this scene beside that of us fucking for the last time, fucking for the first time, of you fingering one of the pearls on my neck, stroking my cheek with the edge of a finger, so softly, as if my skin were a membrane, a sheet of cells so thin it might break at the slightest pressure.

I wonder if anyone can love without hating from time to time. I realize that I never believed for once that you had stopped loving me in your hatred, just as I never believed, in the beginning, when you told me you didn't believe in love.

Do you remember the first time you told me you loved me? Do you remember that I didn't reply? I just lifted my head to kiss you, and said nothing. We were on my bed, in Georgia. You were on top of me. We wouldn't have sex for the first time for another year and a half. You whispered "I love you" and your eyes could've been staring at a holy relic.

I was a young girl and my hair was long and I'd given myself to you long before I ever understood what that meant. There you were, the man I had chosen, looking at me, your angel, your erection filling the entire room. I was 16. I remember your eyes. I wrote to you and apologized for not saying "I love you." You asked if I thought I would ever say it, and I said yes, of course.

I said it until you stopped, and then I said it in whispers. I say it now.

August 2002

So strangers sat, lovers still, but never knowing what to say, what to think, how to regard one another. We started fucking harder and talking less, struggling to find identities again, not in one another but in ourselves. I couldn't be she whom he loves, understands, can explain to the masses so much more clearly than she herself. So who was I? Who was he?

I clung to "writer," he to "traveler," but still all these messy things float around. She who betrayed him. He who could not forgive.

Carrier of his fetus. Memory. Other. No longer his love. A picture of her, of a pretty dead ghost. And that was all I was.

July 2002

When he was in love with me, he told me I was the most unselfish person he knew. The kindest, the most beautiful, the bodhisattva, the pearl. Though I could not plainly believe, it meant the world that he, the most intelligent, the most logical, the most sensual, thought these wonderful things about *me*. It didn't matter whether they were true. He'd say "no, you're not perfect... you're perfect for me."

His conception of me sailed above me, watched me, guided and protected me, made me blush and made me smile, kept me from hopelessness and downfall. No matter what, I could always escape to a world where I was loved, to Greece and Italy and sex three times a day. It was the backdrop, the possibility.

I remember all of it, what it was to have such serenity. How "I love you" made me feel, a physical reaction and a heat so different.

But who were those people who could look at one another silently, confident that those looks would convey all, everything would be rightly interpreted, would add to a stock of love and understanding? Those people lost their identities when the tide rushed through, when I failed him and he failed me.

Where to start? The hotel rooms? The yelling? Back to the lake where Robyn lost her ring? Two weeks ago when she lost her baby? Five months ago when Ben got out of jail? We have been three days in these people's lives and how the sickness rains down. He is angry, always going "agro" and causing scenes. The neighbor, the landlord, the hotel cashier, his parents, Jenny, us, and Robyn, always, always Robyn. Such a perfect target, she is a clean freak who used to be a cheerleader. She went to Catholic school, was kicked out of her parents' house when she quit being an overachiever. Her face crumples when Ben yells at her. They get drunk when things get bad, get high, get away, go to concerts.

Behind a wall, from a cushion on the floor, I heard him scream at her and fuck her and sodomize her while she whimpered and said "stop." I heard him slap her when she walked away, saw him grab her by the arm as she started to walk into the other room, naked. I heard her ask me, the next morning, what exactly had *happened*. Why did he get mad? What did Jenny *say* to him?

She asked me if *love was enough*.

I told her to leave him. She said no one had ever told her that before. I made a bracelet for her, hugged her, went after her when things were bad and told her it would be okay. She gave me her second favorite pair of jeans. I wanted to be her very best friend. I wanted her to run away with us. When Ben found out he chased us out of the house with a golf club.

They made us look happy.

June 2002

I don't dwell on it, except to wonder what I would look and feel like if I were still pregnant. I no longer think of a lost child, but still feel something when I see mothers carrying newborn babies, visibly pregnant women, ads for pregnancy tests. Something gives me a shove, saying "don't you forget." This will fade, but, no, I won't forget. It is something I cannot take back, yet I can't conjure up that *not alone* feeling now. I'm left with a remembrance of something other than morning sickness and worry, something I can assign adjectives to describe, but cannot put myself back into it, mentally. I can't think up the pregnant feeling. It'd be like thinking up an orgasm without actually having one. There is the same yearning associated. I want it back.

September 2002

My lover wears my St. Jude relic medal; he hardly ever takes it off. Ever symbolic is my life, at times poetically so, and we have accepted ourselves as hopeless cases. We mourn daily the same lost cause - a merging of souls such as we once enjoyed and called ourselves in love, a perfect state, untainted. I miss that unscarred togetherness so desperately. I consider even the actuality of bearing his child, just so I could look into its eyes seeking the duality, hold it to me as a testimony that our electricity will never die off. It is utter madness, and greatest sincerity. Through terrors I have seen it, and through sunlight.

This breeze is dear to me, one we have made, looking to the sky, snaking our arms and spidering our fingers, two children of the wind as we are. I wonder if this field, the others, these towns and big-rigs and UFO's spotted at the beach, the desert and the cement and the lacking, the anger, the tears and the silences drenched in sadness and frustration, the soul-spanning guilt and the Interstates that can dull it, the ant lines and lonely middle aged men, songs sung in fragments, lack of a theme - all of it, even blood and hatred, is it not the reality our unreality was made for? Apart from one another, we both needed this somehow.

May 2002

In a past life I may have been a mock Spanish dancer, with some fake red flowers in my dyed-black hair (not in a gothic way, oh no, not like a raven's feathers, but like something more permanent, black automobile touch-up paint). I might have moved in a way that wasn't stilted, I might have had love affairs with strangers and enjoyed it. I might not have been so sensitive, and maybe I never worried about the reasons for making art. Maybe I kept a journal I let no one read, maybe I was content. I bet when I was a mock Spanish dancer I never took pictures of myself naked, and if I did, it never occurred to me to show them to anyone else. Maybe my waist was small and my breasts were perfect, maybe I had very white teeth. If my eyes were the sort that look all the more lovely in black and gold frocks, I probably dressed them every morning and never checked to see that the lines weren't smeared, because I didn't need an excuse to look at myself, and I didn't need to tie cherry stems in knots with my tongue. No one needed to tell me I was a good lover, or that I had the capacity to become one over time, or that no, I really wasn't just making a fool of myself all those years, all those dances.

March 2001

I walk down the line of an empty road on my tip-toes and whisper conversations with myself. I'm pretending to be a spy and I'm paranoid that I've been found out. Each tree is screaming at me, probably hiding some chic dark-haired assassin only I could conjure up.

Me, I'm just trying to look nonchalant. I dart my eyes back and forth and know it is of no use. The fantasy killer will see into my heart with all its fantasy secrets and I'll die a martyr for the decadent lifestyle I'm not really living. Oh to be intense, to be stark, crisp, focused, on. Or to be romantic, whimsical, dramatic, lush. to be anything but a lost fairytale girl with nowhere to go and too long a road to walk along would be a step up on that ladder of art, artifice, and other related punch lines. So I stop walking, observe the moths and the lamplights, let out a long sigh, and continue.

I'll never know enough words to make you realize that I love you.

July 2000

Date?

Katharine Tillman is me. She grew up in a small south Georgia town where most people didn't read books. She made straight A's and websites and fell in love. She got into college at NYU, where she studied cell biology and then art and then dropped out before she even finished the first year. She hitch-hiked around the United States with her boyfriend for 6 months and saw many things and was very sad. She had an abortion and stopped traveling and he left her. He came back after a month and Niagara Falls and now they have a cute apartment and everything is okay again.

She wants to be a writer.
