

# *Split the Lark*

Notebook entries 2005

Roxanne Carter



[www.persephassa.com](http://www.persephassa.com)

© 2009 roxanne carter

Denver, Colorado

**JANUARY II**

softening of human sounds, floorboards creaking overhead. the radiator lets out steam, thumps, pings. our sheets settle, the cat coughs at the door. gathering light along with dust. ivy creeps up the window, spreading its long nimble fingers over glass. our books fold over us, fall to the floor. your breath comes, sweet & round. i can hear the furnace in the basement, yawning its iron mouth. snow crisping in the moonlight. our waddlesome duck shoes wait by the door way, next to the cedar lined closet guarding our coats, empty sleeves hanging loosely, releasing monotonous gestures. my hands are cool under weight of feather pillows on a bed. i dream that you have left for a tropical island without me and i submerge myself in sadness, a mudslide of tears, longing for hot afternoon rainstorms, lush flowers, smooth humid skin. i love this snow though, this honest winter, ice forming on mossy stone steps, clumps of snowfall pushed against sidewalks, the lean sides of new england houses, the smell of burning wood and salt in the air. i like the clinging warmth of our bed, burial under down and wool, the shocking cold of the morning and the pleasure of a hot cup of tea. of hot warm anything. chilly hands under hot water from the kitchen sink. a cold mouth pressed to a warm one. standing before an open oven door after the baking is done.

**JANUARY 12**

i stand in the auditorium with dental floss wrapped around my index finger. it is cool in here, the windows loose in their frames, letting some of the brittle air creep in. looking out on downcity, i see rooftops bleached with snow, a dark grey sky like pencil lead. two great mesh iron faces mounted on the side of the theatre across the street look out solemnly on an empty courtyard. it's a quiet day, full of sighs, countless cups of tea, hasty notes pinned everywhere, reckless emails. in the hallway a discarded poinsettia waits for the trash, it's intense red leaves dry and curling at the edges like old paper. i long to go home, to shut off these machines and this light, the objects that keep me here, answering the phone. soon i'll slip on my mittens, put on my coat, wrap my scarf around my neck, and walk down bricklaid sidewalks to kennedy station, where the buses slide in and out of port, moving passengers around in a neat symmetrical dance. my bus leans slightly to the side and travels beneath the city in an underground tunnel. it is too dark, even, to read a book.

**JANUARY 13**

## Snowflakes

dainty and memorable spectacle of shrouded buildings, paths sliced through banks layers of neat white cake tall women struggle in wool coats, drawn like moths towards light or electricity, dissipating in the air, hot breathes mingling under prowling tree limbs shaking sheets of snow - streets vanish, cars don't go anywhere, but sit silently like discarded relics. windows dusted by frost, trashcans in the alleyway wear white chef's hats. snow drifts in the front door, slides between the window panes, catches in the cuff of my white mitten. we turn on the static of the radio, the whistle of the tea kettle, the thump, ping, hiss of the radiator.

**JANUARY 19**

i'd like to stay in. i want a snow day, gallons of coconut tea in my yixing teapot & coconut cookies from not just spices down the street. i'll plow through books, bedsheets, the laundry. i like days with nothing to do but meandering. stray bits of string, dirty drinking glasses on the countertop. on sunday morning we wake late, brushing cold sunlight from our eyes. the yard is brilliant white, treelimb wickedly, deliciously bare. we walk down hope to seven stars, settling at a table

with our reading, cafe au lait and cute round lemon cake, with powdered sugar sprinkled on top. the cake is slightly bitter, and then fiercely so towards the bottom, a concentrate having sunk down, transforming the delicate cake into an extremely tart soggy pastry. we don't mind so much and eat it anyway. we walk home holding hands, though you say it's pointless with mittens on. today i force myself through the morning. my hands are cold even in two layers of gloves, and my ears sting. the snow is beautiful from inside, clutching a mug of gen mai cha. the streets are an intense, brooding gray, like everything has frozen and turned to stone - not even the flags wave, and pedestrians walk stiffly, holding their arms in.

## **JANUARY 26**

white washed sky. in the morning i find my umbrella hanging upside, collecting snowflakes in the basin of its bow. you say, *you're not taking that with you, are you? are you one of THOSE people?* i don't like the brush of snow hitting my face, the melting ick and frostiness of it. i want to wear my velvet hat, despite the weather, the brutal tenaciousness of littering snow. my one concession is the practical, awkward duck boots i pair with my moiré dress and double strand of french jet beads. i wear elbow length black gloves under my soft green mittens,

more for warmth than elegance. winter devours some of my romantic notions. i get dry skin, chapped lips, panic at sudden cold, at too-long cold, at endurance and discomfort. fogged glasses, lost earrings, shocking heating bills. the irritating noises and grumbles of the radiator. what i keep. roasting chestnuts, peeling the skin away, eating the plump meat inside. shots of scotch mixed with warmed maple syrup. snowdays when the city shuts down, spent reading warm in bed with tea and popcorn in a yellow mixing bowl. living room picnics with screenings of french foreign films. impromptu runs to the corner bakery for fresh sourdough. the beach with snow drifts instead of sand. women in coats with fur lined collars. girls knitting, then purling on the bus. the stamp of you knocking snow from your boots in the foyer, your pink tinged cheeks when you come in from the cold.

## **FEBRUARY 8**

ladies wait on shelves, their spines straight, unutterably elegant. they are betrayed by their own beauty, the forgotten names of their authors, the titles that have slid into obscurity, waiting to be discarded from the catalogue. books in plain library bindings sit deserted; in their pages an irreversible chemical process sets about its business. text fades, pages crumble like insect wings

without even being touched. it seems a stroke of good fortune to find a novel that has not been checked out since 1977. i feel like i am doing it a favor. seeing it for the first time in it's life. maybe no one has ever removed the book from the bounds of library walls. there's nothing worse than remaining unread. it makes the gesture of publishing seem a farce. why had they even bothered if no one would even read it for free? at the clark library, oscar wilde's presentation copy of *Ballad of Reading Gaol*, inscribed to lord alfred douglas, stood proudly on the shelf, its pages uncut. not only had everyone read it, the one person who mattered had not. even bothered to slit open this testament with the feeble blade of a letter opener. he wrote some letters on graph paper. he couldn't afford anything better. still, his handwriting was fine & lean. if i find a book that has been here for thirty years, & it has never been checked out, does it belong to me? maybe it didn't even exist until i started to look for it. it may have assembled itself into being at that precise moment. shoved its way in, pushing over a bookend. what i like best are things that are left.

## **FEBRUARY 14**

we finally have a bathtub we both fit in. our legs still overlap, railroad crossing, a cat's cradle in the porcelain tub, bubbles rising up & slipping over the edge. we

turn out the fluorescent lights; it isn't pleasant to bath under a hard violent light. i like the light of a candle, your face soft, blinking back shadows. we put salt in the water to make it like the sea. meandering sailing ships pivot in the caulking of the tile. you ask me what my plans are and i say i'm like that, a canvas mast, a summer afternoon. i say, you're a battleship, a masculine battleship forging intellectual space. i'm just a simple sailboat wandering here and there, accepting whatever comes along. i'm a mermaid in a bathtub, heating my reptilian flesh to escape the icy fingers of a cold night. at first the water's too hot to stand. your toes turn lobster red, an angry irritated red. you were overeager. eventually the broiler runs out of hot water and cold water starts to pour out of the faucet. we slip in facing each other, settling into the enveloping warmth, fine downy hairs curling at our necks. it is easy not to say anything now, the warmth curdles even in my throat. i fold my hands against your knees. our body temperatures rise, so that even when we slip into the cool sheets of our bed after drying off our skin is still warm, despite the wintry air.

### **FEBRUARY 23**

kittens crescendo. tin can trumpets, host of throaty cries. their mother raises her voice in duet, flinging arias out against the bedroom walls. we pull the

pillows up over our heads, turning our ears towards feathers and down, drowning out the noise with the ever increasing morning light, slithering cold fingers over pale grey sheets. i get up reluctantly, shower staring at the swirl of fine red hair with ennui as i press with my finger against the yellow tile. my warm worn sleeping clothes lay slumped in the separate bathtub. i come back to the bedroom shivering with wet hair; you're still asleep, your quiet pink face dwarfed by the mounds of blankets heaped around you. the cat mewls & winds between my ankles, her kittens wobbling and angling in their nesting box for a good look as i rifle though a dresser drawer for a suitable thing to wear. it doesn't matter much; i'd rather not go anywhere today. i'd much prefer dedicate myself to something more refined than sitting in my cubicle wasting time. there' so much i could do if i stayed home. but there, i'm washed and dressed and my mittens are in the pockets of my coat.

i can write anywhere though; so i pull out my notebook on the bus, and open up a text editor in the office.

## **MARCH 7**

we take our thimble feelings. walk along a dusky road in the early morning, the city absent of cars, snow melting at street corners into a dull colorless sludge.

you pull your cap down over your ears, push your face out against the air, tingeing your cheeks a subtle pink. in the bus station we buy juice and observe the ranks of travelers waiting in faux leather seats, slumped over luggage with coffee cups clasped in their pale hands. on the bus you read, your book propped in your lap, while i gaze out the window at trash bags caught on telephone poles and the distinct vibrant blue of the sky at the tree line. once in boston we walk along the harbor, stopping to inspect a large red ship christened *the divine princess* and to watch two festive tugboats chug along. at the aquarium i pause before a tank of jellyfish and wonder if i'm having fun yet, if today is some transcendent day that will stand out in my memory besides those odd and inconsequential things i seem to stockpile like a wary and manic bird. it doesn't really matter what significance it will take on while it's happening. i move through it, often without noticing myself or my reactions. still, we are surprised by seadragons that camouflage themselves as kelp, and fascinated by the bulk and ugliness of barracuda swimming with sharks and sea turtles in a relentless neverending spiral, back dropped by a fiberglass reef and bordered on the outside by an array of sad house-bound penguins. thousands of creatures caught forever in one moment, circulating through their tanks and exhibit spaces with little variation, sometimes forced to change direction by children, pushing a

button to reverse the direction of the current. swim in, swim in. outside, the sea beats up against the docks and seagulls gaze with intensity at tourists dribbling roasted nuts on the sidewalk.

### **MARCH 14**

the lumbering bus approaches the sidewalk, leaning waywardly. i step back as if it will topple and crush me, glancing frantically back towards our house where you sit still cozy in bed with a book propped open on your lap and kitten nestled by your side. at the next stop a gaggle of long limbed swannish girls boards, slinging totes over their shoulders and shaking out their long hair like falling water. all four of them are wearing jeans and sneakers and there is absolutely nothing offensive or out of place about them. they look exactly how they are supposed to, down to their pores. they all have salon tans, burnished peach skin bursting out from this grey day, sidewalks and rooftops encrusted with ice. even their fingers glow like copper pennies. they stand out against everyone else, pedestrians in clunkish duck boots and solid warm coats and bleached winter flesh. they radiate electric sun. i shrink away in my seat, writing run-on sentences about the weather in my red notebook, occasionally looking up to check our progress towards the city's center and my bus stop, where i'll

hurry, following my own pattern of sunlight and shadow cast on the wall, to the nearest coffee shop for a regular with cream, no sugar.

## **MARCH 21**

linda and i went to a horror flick and we screamed at the correct moments in sync with the soundtrack; sometimes i lifted my hands up as if to ward off the screen and peered out in between my fingers. duck and cover. it wasn't a very good movie but it was like a good rollercoaster ride, with astonishing scenery and a few moments of heart stomping terror, like when your body just feels flat and you want to run out of theatre without your coat. to be in the light at least. while you're in there it could be any time of day. i forget about everything and feel real concern as if the actors are real people or sympathetic characters in a good book. i am reeled in easily by any half-baked plotline, and just jump merrily over the gaping holes. later i buy some earrings that look like mexican paper cuts, lacey and adorned with roses. *they look very fragile*, linda says, not once but three times so that i begin to wonder if she thinks i'll break them.

**MARCH 29**

## At the Drop of A Hat

you'll leave at the drop of a hat. take this heap, this assortment, stray bits of lace, odds and ends, merry widows, maillots and unadorned dresses. you'll gather them together, stuff them in a valise with your tubes of lipstick and tattered dog-eared books, dime-store novels on viscous yellow paper and classics printed on sheets as thin as the pages of the bible, like they're something holy, canonical, something to read and commit to memory. your mind will reel with these words. these things are important, along with the scattered remains of your silk stockings, skin crèmes and blank notebooks. your shoes will become worn down at the heels on your way to the airport. you will hold your valise together with your great-grandfather's hideous neckties. in the center of the airport is a blue electric bar serving only electric blue drinks, and you will sip your martini languorously, watching jets take off over the ocean, knocking unvanquished tears from your thickly mascara coated eyelashes. through your eyelashes the city will disappear. it all happens so quickly, skyscrapers receding into the horizon along with the stars of the sidewalks and skinny palm trees. you will hide your face under the palm of your hand, and your martini will dip

casually low in your belly. it's the only way to go, going away always away going a long way from here.

## **APRIL I**

it's friday afternoon and we are in a car merging with the traffic at the crossroads of two highways, speeding through a desolate wasteland of tarmac bordered by outlet shopping malls and narrow bands of dirt. sarah is dominating the conversation; the girl who is driving remains silent, focusing on the road, while i interject my strange and anxious remarks here and there - *oh quiet so, indeed*. sarah's face is pert, with a lapin-like nose, and her eyes enforce her boisterous jokes and the steady animation of her hands. on one finger she wears a ring made of the *?!* button from a computer keyboard. the sky outside is brutally blue, and the light streams in the car windows, harshly singing our pale winter skin. as we broach the ramp where the two roads converge, our conversation pauses as we notice, on the banks of the meridian between the ribbons of road, a clutch of teenage boys in black hoodies and untidy jeans. they are riding bicycles over a small mound of earth topped by a large oak tree which reigns over this small patch of land in the middle of nothing. how they (the boys and the tree, the tree puzzles me as much, for it's sheer immense size) got

there is a mystery; there is no obvious access - the road doesn't end anywhere, but just encompasses, like a mouth swallowing an egg. at the other end of the field a gaggle of canadian geese wobbles, heads turning sharply to follow the descent of passing cars. these two dioramas pay no attention to each other, and appear to be in totally different worlds, acting out their own delicate dramas in a sort of autonomous void, though they inhabit the same space. somehow, these two disparate groups had decided to assemble in this most unlikely place, gathered around a tree on a hill in a field of dirt between crossing roads on the coast of new england. we observe them, and pass on, erasing the tenuous link between them which had hung from the cornea of our eyes, drooping threads of thought like weak telephone wire between geese, teenage boys, and girls riding in a car.

#### **APRIL 4**

*i'd like to make an installation like this sometime she says. in a hotel like this? in a marriot? the other girl says incredulously. yeah yeah she says. she's petite, her face round and full like a boiled egg. her teeth ache; she cracks her forehead against the wall of the elevator. later we sit playing awkward games with wary uncomfortable people in a dull falsely lonely hotel ballroom. the room is stuffy,*

decorated in beige with non-offensive track lighting and discrete wallpaper. a painting of dashing sailboats on an overblown ocean inevitably tilts to the side, dumping out sea-water on the loafers of the people who sit taking notes in sterile silence. we talk about stories, and about plots, *you need a resolution, a conflict, where's the action?* a man says. let's just stand still, i don't think anything really needs to happen, except this slow effacing of time. the good egg sits clutching a stuffed doll, attempting to figure out her 'story.' she has sneakers on with no socks and her eyeliner has pointed wing-tips, like cleopatra. some unutterable phrases start a conversation.

i'd like to run away, around the hotel, past the boats docked in the harbor to the treacherous grim cliffs looking out over the sea. come back, swim in the richly chlorinated pool in my matching underwear set, walk back to my room leaving fat wet footprints in the utilitarian carpet, order room service, watch television and pour countless buckets of ice into the bathtub. succumb to the tide of bedsheets, flounce over the waves of comforters and pillowcases. on the bathroom floor there are several strands of long, wavy dark hair. i come back to the room, having not run away after all, and sit looking out on the stormy sky and a sliver of the drowning sea. the undraped trees outside pierce the sky, full of longing. i stand under an awning while others take smoke breaks, my hands

gravely cold, alice blue. my coat has a tag inside that reads *wear in good health*. i feel fine.

#### **APRIL 14**

yuri says her favorite words in english are *flower thief*. whenever she says this i am reminded of a song i used to listen to high school from ruby's salt peter album - *There's a flower thief in my back yard again, / I'll grin my teeth to make him stay, / Trap him in my flower bed and then I'll feed him with my paraffin*. when yuri says this we're walking down hope street after dinner. it's a colder night than it should be, a sort of mid-april disappointment (i'm eager for warmer nights, with accompanying lighter clothes and less cumbersome shoes, not to mention a relief from this leaf-less sky, pierced by the sharp branches of lonely trees). we pass by a planter full of daffodils and i snap one off down near the root, and hold it cheerfully aloft, like a pinwheel. there is no wind. yuri says, there are hyacinths growing in her yard. i think they look like a bevy those silk flower beehive hats from the 60s. a sort of cluster of grandmas in lavender and cornflower blue huddled on the earth, a lady's society in the grass. she says, *yesterday i walked around the neighborhood and stole flower's from people's gardens*. you can have spring by taking it, bodily. this seems romantic to me, i'd like to dress all in black

and wander around the charming houses in my neighborhood, sneaking flowers from their beds. i'd take them early in the morning, before the mail comes. you look at my flower with its full nodding head and say, *oh poor flower, now it will die. it will die anyway*, i say, thinking of the argument made between clara and paul in dh lawrences' sons and lovers. "I don't want the corpses of flowers about me." paul calls it "a stiff, artificial notion," but i think it's an attractive notion, even if it disagrees with me. why can't flowers be corpses, they do rot, grow soft and mushy in their vases, leak their color onto the table. i'm fine with having corpses in the dining room. i put my stolen daffodil in a bud vase and stand it proudly next to the candy dish on the yellow tablecloth.

## **APRIL 21**

i wonder what happens to insects in the winter. do they hibernate with stockpiles of rotting fruit, do they freeze inside the icicles that hang from the eaves of house, poised in flight. suddenly in spring they appear, criss-crossing the sidewalk under my feet, tiny movements made at the corner of my eye, almost indecipherable. where do they come from, where have they gone. it is almost as if they are born from the full bellied tulips and white forsythia that bloom splendidly in the crackling day. the sun is stunning. the sidewalk curbs are all

banked with glittering sand, as if a sea washed through the city's streets and then was swept away by the curl of the tide. if i collected the sand from the gutters, i could make a sandcastle, and we could be king and queen. we open our windows for the first time, the cat sits longingly at the windowsill, huffing against the hatched screen. i lie in bed cradling a book with one arm, the other spooning orange sherbet from a lime green melamine bowl. i have a technique, i have two pillows lumped up under my head and my body is titled precariously on the sea of bed sheets. if i get tired i put my bowl on the nightstand and cover my eyes with my book, so that that the text gets blurry and unreadable and the world goes out. i wait for the telephone to ring or your footsteps in the doorway. these are the only things that will disturb me, otherwise i sleep through everything, time slipping, the cat crying for her dinner.

### **APRIL 27**

a rainy day has a trenchcoat, has hot coffee and library books in a plastic grocery bag. my umbrella is crooked, bent, but it will suffice; as long as my mascara doesn't run and the red of my lips doesn't bleed onto my teeth. a rainy day has galoshes and clean concrete, all the ash and spit and piss washed away into gutters, out to sea. i love the metallic gleam of a cloud soaked sky, and the

narrow harsh band of ocean embracing the horizon. my socks come up to my knees and slip down, despite what i may do a rainy day has galoshes and bristled tongues poking from round mouths to taste industrial waste, sustenance from the sky. i collect rain drops in tea cups, export baby cirrocumulus clouds in envelopes, dodge the threatening storm with a newspaper bent over my head, like a sweetly clumsy woman in an old film. it always seems to be raining in black and white.

## **APRIL 28**

Catharine

catharine is a lean, clumsily shy introvert who fell in love with cartoon characters and spent her trust fund on salt water taffy and costume jewelry. neither of these things were accomplished with a sense of irony; she is completely honest, and her infatuations and sweet tooth are sincere. she has a red bicycle with a wicker basket hanging from the handlebars that she peddles all over town, down to the beach for bonfires and beer or to the strip mall for miso and sashimi. once she fell in love with a pale baby-faced video store clerk who was named after a bird. they lived together with his father in a cavernous apartment next to a cemetery. the walls were lined floor-to-ceiling with laser

discs and VHS tapes and they would sit eating pineapple upside-down cake while watching italian giallos in front of the flickering TV set. eventually he left her for a much younger girl, though she was young herself.

i met her at church where prophets were to be found in the pews clasping hymnals in indulgent hands. her father was the pastor and his voice presided, and she said Amen. her old sister said amend and the youngest said ahhhhh and the next-to-youngest said nothing at all. i was a brat and had everything to say; pulling catharine's fine blonde hair and laughing at the ridiculous flounces of her dress. her mother stuffed my face with applesauce and we went merrily into bible class, memorizing our verses and singing banal christian anthems with aplomb.

later she wore moccasins that transformed into tap shoes and everything happened so fast, rat-a-tat-tat. her family was excommunicated from the church and her father walked around wearing a pyramid hat, in order to focus the spiritual vibrations of the ancient egyptian gods straight into his hypothalamus. she lived for awhile in a teepee, and then still later in a tent on top of a trampoline in her mother's backyard. i always wondered what she did when it rained; if she went inside, stamping her feet and flinging damp hair off her brow. she changed her name to deborah in an adolescent fit over her family's constant

intonation of the consonant C – mother and father chelsea and kyle, daughters kirsten, catharine, karen, and courtney. though shortlasted, it created a sort of identity crisis from which she has never recovered.

we wore out our satin slippers dancing at goth clubs in hollywood with elegantly sinuous people. mostly we danced with ourselves, and often we wore lilies in our hair and splashed sweetly cold water on our flushed faces from the bathroom faucet while cleopatra-eyed women watched with disingenuous expressions. we drank expensive gin together in cheap paper cups, wore out our lipstick stealing kisses and cigarettes from unsuspecting boys. when she went to europe i waited for her on the cliffs looking out over the sea. i was looking in the wrong direction, but that's inconsequential. sometimes in the car we would scream for no reason. once, when we teased a man mercilessly at a bar, she regretted her own brutality, despite the man's insincere posturing and our delighted laughter. she was a failed suicide who felt a tremendous weight which was lifted by marijuana smoked on school playgrounds on sunday afternoons, as well as weekday nights. she was a straight shot, and curiously brave when drunk, attempting to dispose of her inhibitions along with her clothes on summer evenings in fluorescent swimming pools.

i have heard that she has given up her room in the house of the moustached

man, where she lived for awhile while working for a department store. she left with only her backpack, a pair of worn doc martins and her beach cruiser. i think she is headed for amsterdam but is stranded in california, hopping from couch to couch. apparently she has developed a crush on christ, a transference from comic books that is not altogether surprising considering our childhood in church. i bought an illustrated postcard of jesus by william blake at the met and i'd like to send it to her, but have no forwarding address.

## **MAY 10**

walking requires proper shoes. i can't wear high heels to go down sloping hills. i'd fall against the sky, bruise my forehead, skin my knees on the tops of trees. my socks wrinkle around my ankles like loose skin. it is regrettable but not much can be done. waking requires an open window. otherwise my spatial sense would be distorted, and i'd feel caught in a dream, still in my sheets, the cat curled near my head. first i wake, then i walk. the cat follows me as best it can. at the door it stops and goes no further. i go past long sidewalks and boughs of flowers that descend on the crown of my head. i forget my umbrella, but i won't need it. the clouds hold their breaths, turning blue.

**MAY 13**

the ceiling seems to grow. the clock on the wall is perhaps 300x the size of my head. i sit in my chair and gaze with fascination at the miniature pattern my fishnet stockings have imbedded in my skin, a chain-link over freckles and pale blonde hairs. my hands are crosshatched with scabs from fresh and healing cat scratches. the cat is sitting at home with drops of milk threaded like pearls in its whiskers. beneath the oval nail on my pinkie there is a speck of dirt left over from yesterdays gardening; tiny radish seeds and ruffled nasturtiums like tiny walnuts dropped into moist dark earth. they will come up sprouting thumbelina and doña lucia zarate. if i was a small woman i'd climb naked into the drops of water that coalesce on cucumbers in the market and take a bubble bath. unfortunately i am tall and must settle for momentary delights taken while walking through the park in the center of town, thrilling at touch of misting water that comes off the fountain in the plaza... the pigeons standing, huffed up like powder puffs, take their pleasure with me, blinking their small gleaming eyes at the rainbows cast in the air through refracted light.

**MAY 20**

reading a novel on the public bus is a dangerous activity. first, my eyes wander and trip over paragraphs and footnotes; i get trapped inside parenthesis. then, the countenance of a person absorbed in reading is so attractive to some people that they find occasion to remark on it. *i just love to see a young woman reading*, a particular stranger informs me. she takes my noncommittal guttural utterance as a sign that i would welcome the diversion of her conversation. no matter how fiercely i attach my eyes to the text on the page before me her continuous asides forge their way into the bubble i mistakenly believed myself to inhabit. other people who read on the bus pull out battered paperback romances from their tote bags, the pages smelling of yesterday's lunch. i sit on the bus with crisp copies of fitzgerald or lawrence cradled on my lap, wondering if these crocus sniffing bright young things exist in real life. my seat mate alternately grasps my hand and praises jesus, her palms moist with the sweat of her afternoon cocktail binge. my averted glance out the window does nothing to dissuade these unwelcome tactile advances, and i am particularly stunned when she thumbs my nose and tells me to *be a good girl, now*. when i disembark, her eyes follow me from the departing bus, and her lips coddle the phrase *God Bless You*.

**MAY 25**

this girl rosy with sleep still dreaming of californian sunbleached streets and bougainvillea butterflies toppling backyard gazebos into bright blue swimming pools. sits up in bed, panic blood rushing through her arteries, pulsing like a lily, her eyes round as clocks. something has awakened her - the flowers that lie gasping in the dirt, the treelims that knock against the window pane, shivering in the silk of their pale green leaves. the gloomy cloud drenched sky visible over neighbor's rooftops remind her of something she's forgotten.

**MAY 26**

No Ideas But In Things

Long red scarves flowing flying rippling slipping across white thighs red scarves red lips slim hips I used to wear black ribbons round my wrists and throat I used to run wild ragged breathes and now I sit so still I can hear pages turning I sit and read turn of the century romances with yellowing paper and memorize poems and imagine this. My life as a mermaid, my body turning. tossing on tumbling waves. The sheets of my bed wrapped around my legs, my fingers laced through sheaves of paper. I'm all caught up in feathers and raindrops sliding down my windowpane.

I think I miss things sometimes. The elastic on my ballet slippers that I sewed on myself, thimble fingers pricked for sleeping beauty, drops of blood on black leather shoes. I used to like to go to ballet class and flutter my legs like wings. Like lungs rising and falling. The instructor, a thin angular woman with a face like a slice of cake, told me that my turn-out is all wrong. My foot didn't bend the right way. It wasn't correct; it wouldn't do at all. All I wanted was to be elegant. I'm too uncoordinated, gangly, tall. I can't touch the ground with my hands. My body sighs, resists such expenditures. I have always wanted to dance. To be light; fly, flit, glide. Instead I think I end up looking ridiculous and ragged. The hems on my skirt come loose, flop against my calves. All disorder. I was the only one in the class who wore leg warmers. I suppose they were not in fashion, even with ballerinas.

I thought I would dance, instep curved like Pavlova's, steeped in grace, like Isadora Duncun lifting her flower stem arms, heralding the moon, her long red scarf a gracious goodbye. As a child I took ballet classes at the community center; for a recital, my mother concocted a pink satin tutu with a rainbow grosgrain ribbon and I pranced across the stage delightedly, neglecting all my steps. Later she photographed me in the same costume in first position, standing posed next to a vase of nasturtiums. I also took modern ballet, but in the

manner of a wayward girl, I caught chickenpox and had to forgo our practice sessions, in which we leapt around the gymnasium, bouncing our heels off our bottoms in a simulated act of self flagellation. After an intercession of a few years, in high school I returned my gaze to the world of ballet after falling in love with a bronze casting of Anna Pavlova's foot. I even embroidered it's silhouette on a dishrag in pink and white. I began collecting Tchaikovsky albums, Degas prints and fantasizing about prima ballerinas softening their toe shoes with mallets. I practiced arabesques in the aisles of the library where I worked as a page, using my bookcart as a barre and singing *Alouette gentille alouette, alouette je te plumerais! Je te plumerais la tête, je te plumerais la tête, Et la tête, Et la tête, alouette, alouette, oooooooh* off-key in a thin, narrow whisper. I devoured biographies of Margot Fonteyn, Alicia Markova, and Vaslav Nijinsky, and poured over books on the history of ballet. I tried to sign up for classes at the local studio, but at sixteen I was too old.

My junior year of college I enrolled in beginning ballet at my university. On the first day of class we were given an assignment to purchase proper ballet slippers. Dance is particularly exciting for me because it requires a special kind of shoe. Not functional, ugly shoes like the ones required for hiking or skiing or construction work, but fancy shoes, supple shoes, shoes with a refined

character. Walking in the dancewear shop was a delight. Tap shoes, ballroom dancing shoes, Tango shoes, all stacked up in neat white boxes like loaves of bread. Lithe salesgirls flitted between racks of leotards and wrap skirts with delicate floral prints. Traditionally, women wear pink shoes in ballet class, but I opted for the more masculine black. When purchasing ballet slippers, it is important to note that there is no left or right shoe; with use, the slipper will conform to your foot – in their infancy, these shoes are undecided. I laid down the \$30 for the slippers and splurged on a black leotard and a pair of very soft, very long, carnation pink legwarmers.

Despite my investment in the raiment of ballet, I did not have the where-with-all to continue. The class began at seven AM and after an earnest attempt to be on time, I began to sleep in, come in late, and then not come in at all. All told, I hardly ever went to class. I had begun to feel conspicuously clumsy, knock-kneed. The petite avian girls in class who took instruction and then flew across the room with ease and sublime grace had begun to make me feel jealous and slightly exhausted as I awkwardly, drunkenly stumbled across the parquet floor. I was more invested in the idea of ballet than actually doing it. Actually, not the idea of ballet so much as the things of ballet: pointe shoes with long ribbons to wrap around your ankles, theatrically huge tulle tutus, dying swans, ghost girls

mourning lost loves, young men dressed as fauns, big, histrionic orchestra music. Uncommon objects, beautiful things; I fell in love willingly.

Still, when we would change our clothes in the dressing room the Dance majors would say to me, “Your hair is pretty,” and “I like that dress,” I would feel some satisfaction, towering over them in my four inch stiletto heels. And, with some regret, I still wear my ballet shoes around the house and occasionally sneak out a quick pirouette.

## **JUNE 6**

a good water pitcher is made of glass, not plastic. plastic makes water taste funny, so that your tongue laughs, wants to spit it out onto a houseplant. i like cold water, it feels more fresh, even though it comes direct from the faucet. last summer in minnesota, at inspiration peak, a place described by sinclair lewis as “a glorious 200-mile circle of some 50 lakes scattered among fields and pastures like sequins fallen on an old Paisley shawl” we stopped to pump water from an underground well. the water was crisp, light; we took turns pumping and taking delicate sips from the spigot. in california, in the los padres forest, a waterfall tilts precariously above the highway, partially feeding a rough rock mounted water fountain - locals often make the trek from town up into the hills

specifically to fill their jugs with this water, direct from the mountain side. after hikes through chaparral and groves of oak trees with my family we would stop there on the drive home, to drink, and look out over the valley. the apartment in glendale was behind a supermarket, and periodically i'd leave the house with quarters clasped in one hand and the handles of water jugs in the other. the water vending machine was next to the telephone booth in the parking lot of the supermarket; i would stand waiting for the water to fill, catching drifts of conversation as people hovered over the phone, murmuring *si, si, bien*. we're not so near to a direct water source now - the closest i come is the coiled garden hose, which drips continuously on the concrete driveway, springing leafy green weeds from the cracks and crevices. our glass water pitcher is perfectly stored in the refrigerator. it is kept cold, the glass mists over; a layer of chill i bruise and erase with my careless fingers. sometimes i am afraid that i will drop the pitcher, and shattered glass will go hither and yon across the linoleum floor.

### **JUNE 13**

a walloping air, a sealed envelope, a pillow hot on both sides, smothering your face. bare-leg, bare-arm weather; women cast off their clothes, roll their opaque black stockings down around their ankles, strip-down to neat knobby knees like

two nested plover eggs. women walk carrying packages tied with string, tuned into their headphones, strutting limber-limbed in flip-flops, kung-fu shoes, chinese slippers with mesh toes, huaraches, jellies, suede morrocan slippers, birkenstocks. some wear stolen flowers in their hair, sing gaily as they pass between the shadows cast by skyscrapers. i stand at the bus stop with my hair still wet, suffocating a little in this turgid air. my lungs lurch, my skin sticky like over-ripe fruit; i can feel my face melting, my eyebrows slipping down the sides of my nose. inside i am waiting to escape somewhere else. at the seashore it is ten degrees cooler and a light breeze sails with the incoming waves. girls sink into pleasantly sunbaked sand, listening to the cries of hovering gulls and the more subtle almost imperceptible sound of pebbles clicking and clacking with the roll of the sea. on the bus an older man leans over and says *oh you look lovely today just lovely* and i reply, *thanks*, and push my sunglasses down to cover my eyes.

## **JUNE 17**

i watch a beautiful boy walking next to me, cherry blossoms breaking open over his head, spilling drifts of petals on the sidewalk like snowflakes. is everyone different, *are you different?* i ask him, but he is absorbed by the flowers, which

litter the concrete like the remains of a wedding procession. when i was a flower girl, i was too stunned by the spectacle of stardom to recall the downy roses i clasped in my hot palms. now we press our faces into brimming boughs sighing OH soon the pink will fade. nothing lovely stays; i ask him, *will you stay? or will you stray?* but he's distracted by the hot press of flowers crowding over us in the languid afternoon. the flowers fall like rolling heads into my mouth; i'll sip them, tawny nectarine, wear them on my teeth. fill my eyes brimming with flowers until i can no longer find him though i hear his belated reply echoing through an avalanche of blossoms. we emerge from the shade of blooming trees brushing decaying petals from our hair and smearing the fragrant musk of a thousand flowers from our lips.

## **JUNE 24**

i was a little disconcerted by the sudden heat, which came in like a great wave and smothered everything in it's path. there was nothing to do but wade through it, lifting up my skirt, fanning my hot knees. at the curbs of sidewalks small swamps congealed, mixing dead insects with spit and sludge and candy wrappers. these were stepped over easily, although i could not avoid breathing them in along with the steady, resilient air. every glass of water i drank seeped

out of me and soaked through the thin cotton of my dress. the grime of the city stuck to my eyelids coated every inch of exposed skin. at every opportunity i drenched my face in cold fresh water from public restroom sinks and water fountains, but this did not succeed in banishing the brutality of the sun, which relentlessly beat the day from my wretched self. i sought relief in the shade of trees and tall buildings, only to find the same blistering warmth suffering all around me. even underground, in the tile-lined hallways of the subway system where melancholy faced men mourningly played the violin, it was bitterly hot, invasively so. i began to feel that i must faint, like a woman in a victorian novel, when fainting was the fashionable thing to do, the only thing to do, in some circumstances, which innocence alone can know.

## **JULY 11**

Mary, Mary

she came in full flower, her great head nodding with lethargic slowness under the glaze of afternoon heat. the sky swelled around her, filling the shadows of wilting trees with preternatural light. her shoes were water-logged, gushing a schlepping smack with every meandering step. she had sunk them in a dank black curbside puddle while hastily jay-walking towards the shadowed side of

the street, where the sun was less searing, blocked by the edifice of wide-windowed stone buildings. before she had crossed an odd sensation had overwhelmed her; she felt as if a thousand tiny aphids were creeping up her calves. a thousand fingerprints sinking into her flesh. a thousand miniscule imperceptible things. she had looked around her, but the city was deserted - the streets terrifyingly quiet, the stoplights alternating with futile efficiency for cars that weren't there, and the clock tower heralding hours where no one had to be on time. her eyes met nothing but the grim facade of glass skyscrapers reflecting a parched blue atmosphere, bordered by the solemn seniority of brick and marble. despite the omnipresent heat, she felt a chill, as if she was being monitored by unseen spectators; a flock of tiny birds perched in a cypress tree, a man gazing out of a sixth floor window. on her way to the city she had passed through a park, circumnavigating plots of shorn grass and bowers of seasonal flowers, bent beneath the weight of increasing humidity. passing below a slippery elm she heard an unpleasant crack above her, and jumped back, startled, as a branch sailed from the sky and capsized on the sidewalk before her, scattering twigs and flecks of bark along the path. with it fell two newling birds, fairly though inadequately feathered; they fell clumsily with the slender branch they had nested on, and one had fallen into her arms, while the other dropped with

inevitable force against the concrete walkway. it lay still and moved no more. the bird in her arms shuddered violently and cried out, its eyes wide and searching, as she fumbled, narrowly missing dropping it on the ground next to its unfortunate sibling. the bird's feathers were stark and brittle, like a plastic hair comb, and its beak of an unusually bright yellow. she wished she had some knowledge of wildlife; the identification of birds according to field marks, wing bars, observable differences and similarities. she murmured softly to her charge, and made a nest for it in the recesses of her purse with the soft material of an embroidered handkerchief she carried in her pocketbook.

after she had reached her prime, in that moment after experiencing a strange sensation while making an ordinary cross across the street, she delivered her package to the post, which had been her intention all along. her thoughts were preoccupied, and instead of inserting the envelope into the slot marked 'outgoing mail' she deposited it into the 'local mail' slot. her imagination was fixed on the image of a bird filled with maggots she had seen in the gutter as a child, laying indifferently on its side. she visualized repeatedly with increasing clarity the alarming way the bird had seemed to pump with a quick succession of heartbeats, even in death. the birds feathers had been so fine and pristine, but there underneath it was live and pulsing with squirming larva, who feasted on

the desiccated flesh. it had given her a similar impression to the tingle she had felt just prior to crossing the street. on her way back up the hill she walked through the park, and stooped over the deceased baby bird, wrapping it gently in a piece of paper unearthed from the bottom of her purse. the piece of paper was a letter that she had intended to send, but which was of little importance now that she had blossomed into a fully realized version of herself. she was not sure how long it would last. the dead bird was warm in her hand, and it sent a tender thrill through her body. on the way up the hill, she passed a narrow greenhouse, which she entered unobserved through the back door. a heavy fog immediately clouded her eyeglasses, which she removed, settling gently into her bag near to the now sleeping baby bird. in the back of the greenhouse, past rows of potted ferns and shining flowers, sat several orchids, all in a row. they were uncommonly large, situated in 25 gallon buckets, awning their leaves out like tentacles, the creamy, fragile flowers gazing out with turgid sophistication. she knelt down, and moving aside several leaves, laid the baby bird to rest in the embrace of this exotic plant.

**JULY 14**

## Grace

it was extravagantly boring and fabulously dull.

grace was a marvelous girl, but to maintain the glamour required a certain amount of precaution. her hands must never be exposed to the sun. she must never commit an act which might be deemed imprudent; even the impression of indecorum was to be avoided. if she wore jewels, they must be of a quality to suit her station - otherwise she would go unadorned, and flaunt her flesh instead. these were strict decrees in a pantheon of rules, which she wound up in a tight knot and kept secreted under her tongue, where they were best remembered. occasionally it hindered her conversation, but this wasn't altogether inauspicious, as she wasn't expected to say anything of importance, so no one ever really listened to her anyhow. this led to many frustrating experiences of uninspiring days at-home filled with languid discourse. in society as well as in the presence of servants, she was required to project the appearance of being vaguely but decidedly proper. to betray a sophisticated understanding of morality and the essence of virtue would stain her innocence; therefore, she must adhere to the strictest rules of conduct without acquaintance to the limits of transgression. this extended to her intelligence,

scripted as modest in degree, and not overly invested in subjects not related to fashion, society, family life and travel. in every way she was trained as an ornament, a bauble of incomparable delicacy, refinement and naïveté. about practical matters she had no idea, and suffered a severe ignorance concerning all affairs related to the body and its functions. indeed, she lost all interest in everything which did not immediately concern her physical appearance and position. anything remotely economic, academic, or political was wearisome to her, and in such situations her heart would begin to palpitate in a disagreeable manner, and her face would flush a distressing pink. this she owned to her confusion, which was titanic in proportion to the inconvenience at hand. at such moments she would maneuver the conversation with unhesitating poise towards some triviality concerning the prim and narrow daily rounds of society. these were momentous worries in her ordinary experience of life.

one day, grace went with her sister to the theatre in the company of two gentlemen. it was an unforgettable event. grace wore a green silk dress which she had designed herself. it clung to her body attractively, and the color brought out the freckles in her eyes. she suffered from a pervasive youthful vanity, frankly frivolous though far from self-conscious. the dress was not finished when the carriage came calling, so instead of hemming it she created a fringe along the

décolleté by pulling out the thread. her suitor, a man twenty-five years older than her mere seventeen years, sat to her left in the box seat overlooking the proscenium. he took notice of her elegant attire, but mistook her green dress for a grey one. this she attributed to the poor lighting, but in fact the man was inebriated, and gazed upon her with wet, tipsy eyes. in his jacket pocket he carried a gold flask filled with whiskey, which he tiddled from during intermission. grace's sister caught him in the act, stooping behind a potted plant, and acrimoniously berated him for his indiscretion. in the fifth act of the play, in a moment of sublime romance between the lead characters, vials of orange blossom scented perfume opened beneath the seats and filled the auditorium with their heady aroma. grace sighed deliriously. her beau insisted that he had so much to say to her, so many things to discuss. he took her small porcelain hand in his great gloved paw, and caressed it. she demurred, claiming fatigue, and he promised to meet her the next day at port, where she was going to wish her mother and sister bon voyage. the next morning, he neglected to appear as arranged, and she was sorely astonished at this gaffe, and regretted the missed opportunity for further commiseration. however, upon returning to her apartments, she found her sitting room covered in a literal blanket of little lady dahlias. the lush corpulent flowers, interwoven into an aromatic quilt, were

accompanied by a card on thick cr me paper, bearing his crest and begging her forgiveness; his butler had neglected to wake him up in time for their appointment. grace fancied that the flowers permeated her rooms with their aggressive, provocative fragrance, slipping fingers of silk onto her flesh and awakening her most unfamiliar, unacknowledged desires.

she also received a telegram from her sister, now aboard a Cunard liner sailing for europe. "I'm very sorry indeed, that you've been so much annoyed by that dreadful man," it began. "I do hope it hasn't upset you very much."

completely unaware of whether the 'dreadful man' was her slumbersome suitor or some other indifferent gentleman, and entirely unconscious of what one or the other was supposed to have done, grace wired back quite truthfully that she had not been annoyed at all, and in fact was anticipating an invitation to dine with him that evening. she was ignorant of the unperceived menace threatening her guileless head.

her picturesque imagination visualized an extraordinary engagement followed by a sensational wedding preceding a destined allegorical love peopled by convenient, respectable children and an unerring, considerate husband. what could be more advantageous than to marry a wealthy man in his prime. however, upon her marriage she was greeted by a bewildering rumpus and

remarkable nights of smashing overindulgence accompanied by uncurbed appetites. in all such methods she was untried, and could not quite grasp the distance she had come from the romance she had anticipated, or identify it with the coarse, discordant union she found herself to be a part of. with relentless nostalgia coupled with tacit regret her thoughts would turn again and again towards the homemade dress she had worn, her own staggering simplicity, and the almost frightening eroticism of the showy, rayed flowers her suitor had sent. fortunately, due to his gluttony, unadvised excess, and questionable virtue, grace's lamentable husband was laid to rest in the family crypt before she reached her eighteenth birthday, and grace embarked upon widowhood in a merry plumed hat, her decorum slightly battered and abused, her libido discontented, and her sense of propriety all akimbo. despite the handicap of the homogeneous disguise of her mourning dress, her status as a dowager made for a liberally more intriguing career among the upper crust.

#### **AUGUST 4**

Sunset Motel, Door County, Wisconsin

girls with their faces on backwards pirouette over white lashed waves, fluttering slivers of light through their lean thatched legs. i stand slowly in knee deep

water, bunching my skirt up around my hips. making an effort, however slight. i am uncomfortable in these situations and experience brief moments of panic prior to surging into a crowd. there i am defensive, and possibly laugh too much, interjecting pointless, meandering stories into lines of smooth conversation, derailing them into a stuttering and terrible silence. which i interpret as awkward whether it is or not. if i hadn't mentioned it, no one would have ever noticed. the stain on my shirt, the loose hem on my dress, the way the florid blue veins on the back of my hands stand out so grotesquely. despite all this, at times i muster the courage and strength of will to appear as an elegant and poised beast. my lips a redolent terrible red, smeared across a plain white handkerchief like blood. in the water i especially adapt towards graciousness. my constant illustrative gestures become smooth and translatable, and even my earrings align to become perfectly parallel to one another. in such disguise i began to take notion of fitting in, and i win at card games and drink straight from bottle necks while listening in to scandalous gossip around a flickering bonfire. a girl's laughter rings out from the dark woods, chasing stars from the sky. in my mouth i can still taste the watery solemnity of the great lake, and feel the splinters of flashing fish beneath my skin.

**AUGUST 9**

below the house, in the root cellar where tendrils of thirsty trees reach down into the bricks, a heavy damp moisture permeates the air, alleviating the dry torpor of the rooms above, soundless and still. i go in my stocking feet wearing only a thin white slip, my hair bound at the nape of my neck and a nodule of sweat hovering above my lips. i pull the chains on various exposed light bulbs, illuminating the dank stained concrete corners, filled with cobwebs, and the coal black belly of the swollen furnace. the walls are lined with narrow closets, screw-drivers slid up to the hilt in the bolts, and shelves arrayed with splattered paint cans, ancient, rusted paint trays and putty knives. in one corner rests several lopsided cardboard boxes, and these i gravitate towards, curious about their contents. we live in a duplex, and our upstairs neighbors have moved, leaving their half of the basement free for exploration and plundering. i begin unpacking, unwrapping items from their cerements of yellowed newspaper. most of the things i find are wrapped in papers dated four or five years ago, left behind by previous tenants who left in a hurry. i find love letters from homeboys written to the family's daughter, as well as her christening gown, and portraits of her as a shining, fat cheeked baby wearing startling white. family photographs in cheap metal frames are abundant. school pictures, family sittings,

vacation photos. i make a big pile of these. i also find two dinner sets, complete with tea service. abundant mugs and whimsical candles - even a coffee maker in its sealed box. all of this is terribly interesting, and i separate items into different boxes, those which i will keep, those which will be disposed of, and those which will stay in the cold damp, awaiting the next amateur sleuth. i take board games, and discard teddy bears, which smell musty and strange after their long incarceration underground. i collect the flower vases, and dispose of clothes, disgustingly intimate and wet. an unopened collections bill buried in a box of video tapes sheds some light as to why they would have left all this behind. you come downstairs and laugh at me, standing in my slip surrounded by the detritus of someone else's past.

## **AUGUST 15**

we went outside into the air, which clustered around us, cloying particles of sweat and salt from our already exhausted skin. the sky, haloed with shadows above the rooftops of somber houses and wilting trees, bent towards its center, where the moon hovered out of sight. suddenly, the sky flickered electric white, snapping like a light bulb on the blink, so intense that i squinted and reached out for your warm hand. a round, hollow bellowing followed, crackling along the

telephone wires and waking the dogs in their yards. i went off walking into the neighborhood and you stayed behind, collapsing onto the bed and swiping the sheets off onto the floor. the sky charged and then vibrated with twinkling light, the bolts themselves obscured by the heavy cover of stormy gray clouds. the thunder followed, rolling its laughter over the hot, turgid streets. no rain came, only the continual grip of the heat, suckling moisture from the air, dissipating water from the cat's bowl, from the fish tank. i licked my dry lips and stole flowers from unguarded gardens before hurrying home to sit with damp hands pressed against my hot cheeks.

## **SEPTEMBER 5**

It Would be Better if He Were Dead

astonishingly funny how girls can creep up behind me, baring their teeth. nimble thimble fingers reaching out in the gesture of a caress. they take a loose thread from the hem of my dress and pull. unraveling by happenstance, and without much effort. i can only laugh at my own slipshod bedraggled self, tottering uneasily, looking over my shoulder for further assault. really i have nothing to worry about. really i have nothing. really i have all this: a boy sleeping in bed, his weary self wrapped around a slumbering cat; a room full of splendid, poignant

books and a singularly picturesque window covered with creeping ivy - love without pursuit, solace without demand, things which come easily and unencumbered. everything else is anything else is unwanted, uncalled for. mostly forgotten until the girls come calling, searching through my dresser drawers of neatly folded clothes, perusing my ill-kempt closets for cast-offs, trodding on my most delicate memories with the sleek quick heels of their patent leather shoes. they exclaim, they decry, they take my misguided rage and carry it off in slim handbags, touting newfangled admiration for these soiled, sadly bloated rags. out in the open, where i can see them again after so many years, i am horrified and slightly embarrassed by the sorry state of these forlorn figures, the unseemly shapes they have taken on. unearthed from the bowls of the garden of grooms, they take on horrifying significance, and i am slightly disgusted by the waste their presence perpetuates. what rubbish, how unfortunate, how obnoxious to be reminded of these failures. of my own foolish expenditures, nights spent in anguish, buoyed up by grief. the girls lead them away, lead them by the hand, pull at their coat-tails like puppeteers, laughing their chandelier amusement, their unfulfilled delight. i can't do anything for any of them, whatever happens. i only did things for myself, and that's been done to death.

**SEPTEMBER 8**

## What They Said and How It Ended

the rim of her teacup clinked against her teeth. a shattering sound that his ears swallowed, interpreted as aggressive; bone and gristle, sugar butter bread. a man walking down the street vanished into the line of telephone poles. she made a violent gesture, settling her teacup in its saucer. the boy sitting across from her took her hand and held it, the way a child holds its mother's hand, earnestly and wholehearted. she suspected that he smelled of paper bag lunches and clean sheets. she talked about her home. she had lived in southern california, in hollywood. the boy was calm, listening to her seriously, her words washing over him, wearing him down. he could not tell whether she was happy or sad. her voice lay flat against him, unyielding. it was always hard for him to sympathize with her at first. she made him uncomfortable, her mouth full of regrets, bending over him, loosening itself. her tea was getting cold. he looked out on the fleet of telephone poles, searching for the man who had slid between them and disappeared. they made him feel lonely, this artificial forest, made him think of all the people sitting disconsolate at home, waiting for the phone to ring, for anything to come along and interrupt the silence of long solitary afternoons. for once he was not lonely, in the company of the girl who talked on and on,

twisting her napkin absently in her hands, wringing her worry from it. she talked about the sea, the far-off pacific. *the sky could go on forever, always blue*, she said. *the coast is lacerated with endless ribbons of road, running under a cover of filthy smog*, she said. she spoke quietly, pushing stray sugar crumbs into a pile on the glass tabletop. he observed the widow's peak on her forehead and the way her nostrils flared slightly, as if recalling the bitter acrid scent of the sea. *and you left?* he asked. *i walked along the edge of the great white pacific beach, stumbling delicately from the grasp of incoming waves, and i longed to go away*, she said, and smiled. the smile was pleasant, and he moved nearer to her and touched her trembling, apprehensive hands, stilling her.

## **SEPTEMBER 15**

walking downtown yesterday i looked to my left and a pigeon flew past me like they always do moving from rooftop to telephone wire jostling other birds for that last narrow spot of light. i like how they face the horizon and watch the sun go down every day in and out. i had on pink shoes like bubblegum and a blue dress and i had my hair in a ponytail, high on my head. i walked to the bus station and walked across the cobblestones on which someone, a young man or woman, had scrawled in chalk *i'll miss you*. this was in the part of the station

where people go far-off to other places. no one was there when i walked by; they must have been doing their missing sipping gin in a bar or at home, lonesomely lying in bed watching shadows creep across the floor. once i saw a girl get off a greyhound bus and skip over to the bike rack where her bike was locked. it was a warm day and she was wearing a worn sheer dress with tiny violets printed on it. you could see-through her clear to her underwear. usually i am worried about if you can see my underwear or not, but she had a lovely nonchalance, riding away on her beach cruiser. the other things i see are the things i often do, sympathetic old men admonishing me to smile, business women standing under trees, cigarette in one hand, the other fishing for a light, boys kneeling on the sidewalk waiting for the library to open, people hurrying here and there and everywhere continuous brick buildings and high rises and slick black streets and noise of traffic knocking against the overhead clouds.

## **SEPTEMBER 27**

Oh Donna

my mother was born in florida in a house for unwed mothers and shipped in a bundle by non-stop flight to california, where her grandmother, past menopause, took her as her own daughter. that is how my mother's mother is her own

sister, and my aunt is my grandmother, and my grandmother is my great-grandmother, and my cousin is actually my aunt, my mother's sister. my aunt spit a jar of pennies into her hand. copper shone like blood, dripped down between her fingers with a ping, an echo from deep in her belly laid flat against the sea. watch my aunt laying in the sun. she spent her youth on the coast, turning herself on the hot-to-the-touch golden beach, flipping her narrow body in emulation of receding waves. after her death my uncle, a man i'm unrelated to by blood who quickly remarried in order to perpetuate the illusion that he is not alone in his indifference while aboard corporate cruises to exotic countries, after her death he dumped her back into the sea from which she had come. the coast she grew up on breached the great pacific, and when she was young enough to know, a boy she met there turned his body against hers, and turned into. my aunt gave birth, on the opposite side of a vast continent, her legs reaching out to touch both seas, my mother, and that boy is forgotten; i know only that he had red hair. he may or may not have been a kind man; my aunt may or may not have loved him. perhaps at the time she imagined that her love was insurmountable and that she would become the kind of woman who lives always in regret. still, my mother came before my aunt had reached adulthood herself, her hair still in curls, her skin a bright tawny expanse. my

mother did not discover until adolescence that her erstwhile sister was actually her mother. i suppose she may have regarded this relationship with some degree of shock and reservation, because my aunt was not an attractive woman; rather, she was coarse. the haze of cigarette smoke clung to her burnished skin; she kept a bottle of scotch as her constant companion. my mother was the kind of girl who was neat and lovely, kept straight A's and saw herself as accomplished. she could sew her own clothes, play the piano gracefully, sing on-tune, do her hair in a french-twist, cook an assortment of dishes, the recipes for which she kept in a little green box, catalogued and typed on index cards. the woman she thought of as her mother was a soft, patient person, who admired my mother's studiousness, the sounds of the typewriter clattering and clacking from her bedroom, where she sat before a picture-window looking out on the cotton farm in shafter, ca. after my grandfather's sudden death, which left my grandmother in a slow stuttering panic, my mother was my grandmother's only relief. when she went away to college my mother found dorm life so awkward for her habits that after her freshman year she moved into an apartment nearby, with her mother, whom she loved dearly, after all. during this time, my aunt owned a small business, a donut shop in santa barbara, ca, and lived with her husband in an ultra modern house in the riviera. my grandmother and mother

made some concessions and visited her occasionally for turkey dinners. this pattern continued for many years; my childhood is enumerated with brief episodes in this house, a ranch-style leaning its neck towards the view, swallowing up the oncoming waves. at such events, i would sit at dinner on the right of my uncle whom i am not related to, picking the scabs from his hand. i found them fascinating. i would also play darts in the entertainment room, eat lemon drops from a glass dish, pedal the exercise bike in wild abandonment, and sit in the parlor staring at the globular glass grapes on the coffee table, and the map of the world posted above the fireplace, dotted with thumbtacks over countries my aunt and uncle had visited on cruises. my aunt had another daughter, the one she did not give up, a mop-headed girl who became engaged at a young age to a midwestern boy who promptly died in a motorcycle accident. she submitted to a nervous breakdown which led her to waitress at the lodge in yosemite national park, where she met her husband, an atheist who brought her to a life of twenty years in the wilderness with no telephone or central air. my mother and her cousin (or sister, however you prefer to see it) were good friends, and went to on an ill-fated trip to europe in the year after high school during which they both became violently ill, and were accosted by many men on trains who exposed themselves to the young girls. my aunt claims

that my mother had fallen in love with my father by this point, and that in fact it was not the measles or the uncharming gentlemen which ruined their trip, but my mother's overwhelming desire to return to the states, where my father was working at a factory in order to save money to buy their first house. my mother and father had known each other since childhood; both had lost their own fathers as teenagers, had a natural amiability in their thoughts and perspectives, although my mother was university educated and my father, in addition to his high school diploma, had a mild form of dyslexia, and never read books. at some point, it was decided among these people that my aunt's drinking and smoking had reached its zenith, and all visits and communications with her ceased, including those obligatory holiday gestures. perhaps there was some drama that i was totally unaware of, lost in the haze of childhood; all i know is that we did not see or speak to her for many years, until she came one day to say that she had developed a strange oblong lump on her side, immediately after which she took to her bed and ceased to speak forever. when my grandmother died, my mother wept for days, kneeling on the rose-colored carpet in her bedroom, punching the bible in her lap. when my aunt died, we did not even attend the funeral; my uncle sent us a card afterwards, informing us of the internment in the sea and his successive marriage to a neighboring widow, similarly detached.

my mother only folded in her lips in the semblance of a frown, and threw the card away.

### **SEPTEMBER 28**

Oscar and William

Dear Mother.

Oscar and I are alright and we are enjoying our respective freedom. I sometimes imagine the surprise on your face when you discovered that we were not there to greet you in the cool of the morning; in fact, we had made our escape before your eyes had even closed in sleep. I am sorry about the broken teapot, and the windowpane that we cracked in our haste. I will send you the funds to replace it for with, as soon as our fortunes have been made. Oscar has suggested that we take the task to hand and adopt careers as treasure hunters, which I find a grand suggestion. He is only a boy, but what a boy! I am blessed to have such an intelligent brother. You often said when he was still a wee baby that his round, puckered face resembled the visage of a man in his prime, and Oscar behaves with the appropriate grace of such a personage. Everywhere we go women are tweaking and caressing him; I declare, I am

almost jealous, but thankful for the opportunity these encounters grant to hasten introductions to ladies of class and good breeding. One such gentlewoman, a Miss Jane Dodson, has kindly provided us with the capital to procure a vessel, a tremendous sailing ship aboard which we shall embark on our first voyage, an adventure into uncharted waters where we shall dive to unmentionable depths in search of sunken treasure! Oscar informs me that decrepit pottery and golden doubloons lie for the taking beneath the surging sea, and we are eager to unveil these precious objects and sell them to private collectors and museums at an enormous profit. Oscar is out on the town, negotiating for the purchase of this mackinaw as we speak; I am afraid I am indisposed by a splitting migraine at the moment, and thus could not attend the negotiations with him, but I trust in Oscar's capabilities. Admittedly, I believe that Oscar is angry with me for taking him so far from home; I know his misses you dearly, and he resents the time I spend drinking bourbon with Miss Jane Dobson, but I assure you Mother, I am taking all the care in the world of Oscar, and Miss Jane is a true lady. You always said that you can tell a true lady by her lingerie, and I assure you that beneath her skirt Miss Jane Dobson is impeccable, and also she can hold her liquor like a lumberjack. Well, when next you hear from me, Oscar and I should have completed our enterprise on the high seas,

and returned to the mainland as accomplished seafarers and nouveau riche millionaires.

Sincerely Your Adoring and Devoted Son,  
William

## **SEPTEMBER 29**

### Purgatory Chasm

why do you think she has to stay there in that haunted cove? how could it be the wind. a narrow girl in spindly high heels, high enough to tumble from, sharp enough to prick your finger on and sleep for a thousand and one years. she will kiss you unnecessarily; she will turn herself backwards so far that she'll end up beside you, demanding your attention. she has miraculous legs - they defy gravity, hoist her nimble torso upupup so that the crown of her diaphanous head mixes with the silt that clings to an abalone-encrusted rock. she plucks a hair from your head and wraps it around her index finger so that she will not forget, as she is apt to do, considering her full schedule and the time required to move from here to there. when reminded of her hunger, she nibbles the hair from her fingertip. in her distended belly a bird's nest of human follicles, flecked

pink with bits of chewing gum. cramped in a damp recess against the sea wall, her body neatly folded like origami. so that she has become a crane; she speaks only of herself and the love that she has recently lost hold of, which offends her. after all she is a beautiful girl, thoroughly modern, lacking in irony. she tortures her lower lip, eyes uneasy, invoking pity. she casts out her loneliness, tackled with a feathered hook.

### **OCTOBER 10**

the coming winter rose up from the still, coldwet streets and entered the house. i stumble in my stockingfeet towards the bed, eager from some affection - the high whine and creak of the springs, a release from this cold under flannel sheets. i tell the weather it is too early; it's better to be on time in these situations. i close the door and cradle my teapot in my hands, gathering warmth. the cat burrows down next to me and i tuck him towards my lap; he is unresisting, pliable, a comma curved into me. it has been raining for three days; the backyard is soggy, the late-to-ripen tomatoes glazed with water. my shoes, soaked and dabbed with mud from yesterday's jaunt through the neighborhood, lie in the cedar-lined entry way, attempting to dry, although dampness prevails, curling our book covers backwards. my fingertips are icy and i delight in

sneaking them undercover your shirt as you read, pressing them firmly against yr hot back, goosebumps rising up on your flesh. we do anything to keep warm without turning on the heat, which guzzles oil from our pocketbooks. i'd like to hibernate for the winter, become a bear, soothed by my musty coat of fur and a season's worth of dreams. in my cave i would arrange pyramids of spherical oranges, for late-night snacks to ward off the scurvy and remind me of the heat of the coming sun.

## **OCTOBER 16**

my raincoat lies crumpled in the rocking chair, as if it has just been stepped out of, still warm with the sleeves dangling ineffectually. today it did not rain, but the wind came, shaking water from the trees, flinging leaves onto the glistening street. the sun came and brightened the window, where the cat sat, looking out at the neighbors planting daffodil bulbs in the backyard. our wilted umbrellas lay discarded in the hallway, exhausted from ten days of strenuous use. i woke up with my hair drifting across my face, long strands clinging to my eyelashes. when we go out later in the middle of the afternoon the wind whips my curls into my mouth, brushes the bangs neatly off my forehead, hurdles crumpled leaves at my shins. puddles hover under trees and at doorsteps, refusing to dissipate, holding

onto our passing reflections, hurrying to the bakery to fetch bread for our dinner. i seem to spend all day long contemplating things, reading this book or watching that film, wondering what i could be doing but sitting, instead, rather still, as if something will present itself. the wind rattles the windows, the tea kettle whistles; the cat climbs onto the bed where you sit underlining sentences in a book. i have no desire to begin anything; i pull the sleeves of my red sweater up over my hands, sigh into my cup, cooling the tea. i would like my hair to grow twelve feet long. i would empty it from the balcony, i would escape by my own hair, i would pierce my eyes on the juniper bush. i would like several unannounced dresses to show up in the mailbox. they should beckon with grace; they should fit like a glove. i would wear them dancing, one by one, and wear out my shoes, necessitating a requirement for new shoes, patent leather shoes with french heels and smart petite buckles. when i dance you would smile at me, and stand nearby with your hands at your sides. i would wear several hats, all with veils. the last time i wore a veil i was standing at the bus depot waiting for my bus. i was on my way to meet a girl for a picnic in a cemetery. an old man came to zip up my dress, which was only half-done. he offered me a million dollars if i would accompany him to his bank vault, showing me the key in an envelope in his breast pocket. the shape of the key was worn into the

envelope, which was printed all over with miniscule text. *i have been looking for a girl like you to give all my money to*, he said. *i'm sorry, you have the wrong person*, i replied, cordially. thankfully my bus came, where-by i made my escape. that was the day it started to rain. when it started to rain, lynn and i were perched on the grave of a former governor of rhode island, eating avocado sandies and apple pie with cheese. we sat under a pine tree on the site of the grave, which was befittingly large and circular, a sort of maze of grass and concrete with no obvious monument beyond an inscription on the stair. the rain fell around us like a curtain; at first, it was a gentle shower, and our tree protected the still life we had laid out on a pale blue sheet. later we became lost, wandering aimlessly between headstones of departed Sweets and Darlings. the exit was ambiguous, the grey sky threatening, our feet sore from the long misguided trek through swan point in cocktail dresses and high heels.

## **OCTOBER 19**

Maybelle, How Does Your Garden Grow?

*are you looking for your darling, sweet?* trembling like a kitten a tear slid from her eye. she buttoned her knees, smiling at me, her blunt hair swinging like a knife. she's always late to dinner. the bleak countryside silhouettes her absurd

smallness, her body without moisture, the frigid expression of petulancy embossed upon her face, rust of freckles, fingernails black with grease. in the train yard little lambs are leaping over tracks. if they fall it is an accidental mishap. if the train comes it is misfortune. if the lamb is slaughtered all are children, all are only interrupted. in their play they are dashes, dashes, runs with scissors, rolling down the hill. a boy lies there so still, his tiny fine hand curled up by his face as if he is only just awakening, his mouth softly parted as if in a yawn. *what has happened here, maybelle?* i ask her. a brick will soften the blow. a brick is only mud, a wolf is at the door. a wolf is in maybelle's mouth, howling. *he has eaten all the apples*, she says. *he is wearing mother's nightgown*. he is in the weeds, he is a widow. *he has no mother, he won't be missed*, maybelle says, blue-bleary eyed, rubbing her hands like she was cold or carpet-scuffing. *do you cry?* i ask her. *what is the matter?* i ask her. *there had been a boy who just lay down and Died*, she says. in the foothills at the railway, the little pool where the tadpoles are, he must refuse, she must insist in order that he would. *what happens when you choke someone, do they die? it's horrible that. i couldn't kill a bird by the neck or throat*, maybelle says. she reaches out with her soiled hands and places them about my neck, the peaks of her knuckles like pearls. she giggles, there is something terrible. i shake her from me. maybelle is distraught; she curls her

hands in her lap. *i wanted to give you a shock*, she says, striving to be genuine. *is your throat sore?* she asks. *is he in the yard?* i counter. *is he covered with the heather, is he waiting for you?* she twists her face in a parody of grief. *nebbly, nebbly. he's dead, i know that. don't be hasty. he won't be there, he never goes there.* she calls herself bitter but i don't know why. *i don't want to be here*, maybelle says. *i want to be home where i know i'm safe.* cradled in the shallow ravine, concealed by the abandoned farm littered with construction materials and old cars. maybelle's fingertips were going white. all that mattered was to lie well, disguise her slight bits of rage. *i like to be in control of everything, i feel like such a big girl*, she says. she touched the broken scissors concealed in the waistband of her skirt, handles pointed down. under her skirt she had placed a flesh-colored nylon stocking, stuffed with loose cotton to resemble a sausage. in the field the boy lies with his genitals skinned like a peach. *murder isn't that bad, is it. we all die sometime anyway.*

## **NOVEMBER 2**

### Little Bundle

in my leisure time i am comatose wear a thimble embroider fine linen. i hope we're an average young couple. in the morning i am encumbered by heavy

sheets and turn my eyes against my pillow, putting them out, eyelight. a tree knocks against the window, a flurry of yellow leaves thrusting in the striking blue sky, scattered with perfect clouds. beauty washes away. i keep returning to some gauze, lopsided dream. for one double bed, six sheets 90" x 108", 12 pillowcases 45" by 38½", two heavyweight blankets 80" x 90", one lightweight blanket 80"x90". the fitted sheet on the mattress is pierced full of holes, from the cat's kneading claws, puncture strut. the more threads to the inch the better to love you with. the books on the bedside stand lean precariously, defying gravity until the cat comes and jumps on top of them, jumbling to the floor, pages spilling text onto the cold wood dust. cluttered with little details. interrupted sleep: the cat and anxious telemarketers are the most likely suspects. i flip the switch on the phone to silence the ring. i'll forget to tell you about it so if i try to call you later to ask what i should buy at the market on the way home you won't hear me. luckily you call me. the pantry is full on emptiness. in the early afternoon i pause and stare for a long moment at the round red welt on my knuckle, the result of an accident with the oven. i touched it too closely, i came too near. when i look up the windows in the library are already dark, draped with shadows.

**NOVEMBER 14**

under the weather there's leaves piling up at the edge of the sidewalk, burning gold copper autumn ash nests of spiders. i take a coat from the back of the closet; where the fabric settled into itself there are soft pockets of web, startling white. i pass the time splitting a pomegranate on a plate, sipping tea directly from the spout, cradling the cat, sweeping dust from corners. caught with bits of hair paper dust, lengths of thread. i leave a candle in the window for you. i go outside and look in the window into our house to see what it looks like to passer-by, or how it will look to you when you come home. there is a candle in the window; the shadow of the cat perched on the windowsill bends over the hedge. two bricks are missing from the front stair like gaps in teeth. a dark plunging hole, filled with rats. the cat looks out the window at me, standing near a tree with my sleeves pulled down over my knuckles. when i open the door to go back in she will slip by me and i will start after her, reach for her long plumed tail. her disappointment is palpable. she calls out to the stark trees, shaking their skeletal shadows over the pavement, scratching at the door. the candle at the window flickers, i boil water, dog-ear my book, fold a quilt around my knees. when will you come home, will you come home, come home.

**NOVEMBER 28**

the hill of doves, the parasites. snow comes grandly, plush carpet, proud young thing. i stand aside the clouds of witness, inside the house, moist breath on the windowpane, exquisite trees out of focus, less than trees. i will be waiting here still, holding on for some indication, any miraculous thing to occur. the sun will enter my eye, my mouth will deliver a single word. only this hand battered, drawing blood, bruised and only these things will find misfortune. there's a man in the house, holding his breath. the heat recedes into the floorboards, steam dissipates from glass, snow sinks down into the ground and disappears.

**DECEMBER 4**

## Street Scenes Classics

covetous, heart-breaking dream of a strip mall on main street, containing a shop next-to a vacuum cleaner shop; driving by i take note of the lace-draped headless mannequin standing guard, signaling that connie is open for business. i walk in *dishabille*; connie is napping on a softworn lazy chair, her tender dappled head nodding towards her chest, festooned with saints medals, silver crosses. she is glad to see me, takes me in her velvet arms, exclaiming *mija!* adorns me, ornaments my ears with paste jewelry, costume pearls. everything is as it should

be, smells of rotting flowers, hot irons; i go between the racks tenderly. she brings out dresses, there are so many things that i haven't seen, i've been away so long. this dress and that one are terrible gruesome and i sigh forlornly oh then ah yes when she brings out a yellow chiffon cocktail dress, a taffeta circle skirt, a novelty print day dress. all these and more, more, more. i stack my pile on a display case of clip-on earrings and wonderfully garish broaches. connie reclines in a wicker chair, her hands tremble slightly on her knees, regarding her feet in their embroidered slippers. i go about my business, fingering fabric, slipping into this and that, as she entertains *let me look at you, oh it suits you so well, oh that, it's falling apart, you can have it, mija*. as i paw through a dresser drawer full of lace doilies and linen gloves her sorrow deepens and she murmurs over her aches, ashes, reprobates her wayward children, and reminisces about those halcyon days, when she danced the foxtrot in a gabardine dress with matching shoes and hat, black lines drawn up the back of her calves to imitate silk stockings. in my hands she places the butter soft silk negligee she wore on her wedding night. in my mouth she places a peppermint pinwheel. on my feet she places ruby slippers, glass slippers, red satin point shoes. i twist, i turn, i loose my car keys in a candy dish, under teacups, in the pocket of a fur-trimmed opera coat. connie looks at me kindly, full of generosity, modest courage. *abuela you*

*are beautiful.* in her eyes there are always tears. she never finished grade school; her family pulled her unwilling from junior high to earn her living performing ritualized tasks in a widget factory. all she ever wanted was a beautiful dress, to be beautiful, to be on her own. in her shop she sits near the window display reading romance novels and doing crosswords in ink. her husband is a cobbler who re-heeled the well-heeled kidskin boots i wear, wear out, down-at-the-heel. she wore dancing the waltz, two-step trip. her wedding trousseau came from frederick's of hollywood, plunged to her behind, leaving the expanse of her back bare, bewitching. barely there. just my size. awaking to find i have nothing new, and that the little dress shop is still closed forever, ever after, absolutely.

## **DECEMBER 9**

a relief to wake up. suffered a nightmare of missing persons, vanishing in their birthday suits, too much coincidence an ominous sign. a woman boiling flesh, high heels made of resin, a yowling cat. always the cats. a relief to wake up too late, frantic dashing to get dressed, locate clean socks, smooth my hair across my brow. linda pushing her horn out front, her car covered in flurries of snow. i put my make-up in my coat pockets and stuff leg warmers into my purse,

rushing out with the cat in a box neatly wrapped like a present. the streets in the neighborhood have vanished under an increasing blanket of white, surging up towards the houses, yawning red doors. we inch forward in the morning traffic, go to sit in an antiseptic waiting room smelling strongly of canine panic. we turn our cats over to be sterilized, then go out for breakfast at the seaplane diner on allens avenue; all around us are men with handlebar mustaches drinking black coffee. their pickup trucks and cargo trucks sit frosted like cakes in the lot outside. we order eggs, toast and homefries, then sit discussing mouth-to-mouth familial kisses while the sky sheds snow on the bay, over our very heads.

### **DECEMBER 13**

Messages from Space

*the girl grew white and trembled.*

- oscar wilde, *dorian grey*

my life when it happened was defaced by the haze of preoccupation; it was only later when i wrote about it that it became real, and it was only when i wrote about it that i could not be trusted.

ohhohoh. on wing, to fly, defy gravity, my body's own delicate captivity... oh my sweet birdthing, nitpicker, wary little warbler. seeds in yr hands? they spill over

the linoleum, make an irrevocable mess. don't say it. you will slip the sky is falling. be wary and watchful. go this way, go that way, send me a letter. there are beasts who would paw you with violence and blithely drink of your blood. my heart hides behind lean limber phrases. timber, we're falling. lantern stars explode in orchestra. stoop to gather little flowers. the deer pause to nudge fallen apples from the wind blown grass.

in the sunless forest wild beasts shiver, curl their tails under swollen bellies. i've often loved the cemetery text and i still do. the stormy deep, crimson hued hunger glazed eyes, scoundrels of fair bodies and hooked talons. yr decadence is lovely, december. i am forever imprinted by yr stain...

stars fall with messages written on them. i have discovered the doorway to space. we should all be so lucky to catch them and decipher their secrets. well, not really. i sort of prefer being in the emergent minority. hey, aren't these fucks who leave their HUGE banners in yr guestbooks some of the most putrid scum on the web?

\*

the steps leading up to the house are slick with ice. my hair matted with blood, red on white, snow seeping in the hem of my skirt. a tangled shoelace, a broken bone. somehow i navigate the treacherous steps without tumbling head first

towards catastrophe. wincing slightly, clutching my book bag, coffee cup, tube of lipstick. those essential things. i wish you'd leave the porch light on. i wish i'd filled the bird feeder. the birds are starving, alighting in undressed trees. our house is the only house on the street with a tree out front. the rest vulnerable, unconcealed, guarded only by porches, warden cats and dogs. houses look lonely without trees to defend them from the onslaught of winter. i am layered, my own personal resistance. wedding cake, epidermis, insulation. thermal top and bottom; wool stockings under argyle socks, sneakers and legwarmers. a skirt, a long sleeved shirt, a hand-knit sweater with silver buttons. scarf, cap, mittens, 100% virgin wool coat. on the bus in the very back two middle aged bachelors sit laughing and singing while take long, deep swigs from a gallon jug of neon orange punch. *they offered me the shot, i denied it, one says. never had the flu in my life. i got my remedy. i drink lots of water. look at pretty women.*

### **DECEMBER 30**

somehow i found a way out. later, when it's too late. this morning i wrote my name. this morning, struggling to get past the door, the cat slipped by me and climbed up a cypress tree. in california i borrow the fireplace, share an umbrella. where have i been, waking up late, taking a taxi to the airport. there's nothing

left behind. my rings lie next to the sink in a porcelain teacup. on the plane i win first place in a snowflake making contest judged by the stewardesses. there's something sublime about the sight of one hovering, solitary wing floating between the horizontal landscape and the dazzling frigid sun. in kansas city a woman carrying a vintage samsonite train case sits next to me in the terminal. she is on her way to the funeral of her son. *whenever i think of him*, she says, *he is still a little boy*. on the way back to los angeles, playing parlour games, gazing out at tiny houses with tile roofs, football fields, baseball stadiums, backyard swimming pools, salvage yards, reservoirs, cemeteries. past the rocky mountains the land below us is steeped with red, crimson scarlet. a peppermint pig. my mother took me to the very last house, the one with a blue mailbox. *this doesn't look like a place to live*, she said suspiciously. cloisters of trees and a yard littered with auto parts, slumbering dogs, discarded kitchen appliances. i found aurelia in a trailer that kneels in the grass. we went walking in the rock quarry, the river bottom, drank tea. lauren came and picked us up and we went to dinner at matt's. he made stuffed bell peppers, we drank wine, talked about things in retrospect. after midnight it was decided to embark on a trek through an underground tunnel with bottles of spray paint. above us the cries of coyotes echoed against the hills. in complete darkness, we walked in 3's of 4's with

rachel; lauren felt the wall along the way with her fingertips. we looked for bats, scrawled graffiti (mine was gold), drunken boys collapsed into wet slimy piles of trash, and we scaled a crumbling hill in our dresses and high heel shoes.