In the arboretum

Sally Cobau

The University of Montana

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In the Arboretum

By

Sally Cobau

B.A., Northwestern University, 1990

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

1996

Approved by

[Signatures]

Chairperson

Dean, Graduate School

Date

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School

"In my book love is darker
Than cola. It can burn
A hole clean through you"

-C. D. Wright
LOVE

In spring I spent the night at Tami's. She had twin sisters and lived in a trailer. One day she brought in the best doll and then we were friends. This doll was remarkable for pissing and its big head. There was a boy named Lincoln who was born with a short leg. He wore a special elevator shoe and limped after us to the jungle gym. Grabbing my hands on the shiny bars, I twirled with clenched fingers until I blistered. And then the girl fell off the slide and there were blood stains on the concrete. There was a kid who wasn't in school yet. He had a crew cut and wore overalls. During recess, we stood on our side of the fence like an army. *Red Rover, come over fatty,* we would yell. *Hansel Boy, close your eyes, stick your fat finger through the fence.* Or there were twigs, grass, and gravel to gather and throw at him. One Saturday I went to Tami's trailer and colored until her sister licked stars on our sheets. I preferred doing women's dresses the best, striping them. We both wanted the mint green crayon. The wind came suddenly, stirring our papers about the room—the mint curtains blew loosely and then the rain came, a soft flintery rain sounding like blueberries landing in a tin cup. At night we watched the building falling down, crashing in fire and people screaming. The blue sleeping bag was damp from our bath. We had drawn letters on each other's backs through soap bubbles. The next day her mother fixed us eggs which I hate because they run. I cried because I couldn't stand it, the white part of the egg. Then Tami led me to the piano where she hurt my fingers teaching me a song. Her father had a beard and gun. It said don't go over ten miles per an hour. Then I stole my mother's ring and gave it to Tami on the bus. Her face lit up. She bit into the bright apple appliquéd on the chest of my shirt. *Yum, yum, yum,* she said, but it hurt so I cried. Her mother called my mother, you know how it is. I'm sure you know how it is.
In the second grade, it was about the yellow carpet, sitting with your legs crossed while the girl in back of you put a fake egg down your head, touched your cheeks and shoulders. And the teacher's nails were red. You floated above the clock. You decide to pick violets in the weeds beyond the playground. You have your dog pants on. And your tennis shoes. Today you ran under the parachute again. In the weeds your shoes get muddy. You do some hopscotch, pick up a pebble as if to throw it, your purple and white poncho lifting away from your body. You have your dog pants on. The air is cold, too cold for the dog pants. But the sun is bright, so bright that you squint in the photo outside with the class. Hunched over, unhappy, with your hair blowing. You wet a paper towel and wrap the wilted flowers gently and place them on your desk. You have your dog pants on. The teacher walks by. You want to give her your flowers, but you don't. You carry them home on the bus, run down the hill and then you throw them on the ground. And then you get sick with a bad cold, Eric Belford says how pretty your hair looks when it's brushed. And you spend the night in Dayton, staring out at buildings and you dance with the husband in your pajamas.
DEFORMED

A crooked tree rose from the bank of the creek. We called the tree Nanny and spread back her leaves to loop her branches with plastic coke rings, gathered in mud. We would beg the tree for answers, much like an eight ball. We were at the bus stop. The bus driver wore her hair in a beehive and we always laughed on the bus, I don't know why. Things happened. The bus turned around in a farm by chickens. I don't understand anything except our laughter. Where's that laughter now? I'm leaving the bus. We're rolling on Tate's carpet, trying desperately to keep the balloons afloat with our frantically pumping legs. She has a jungle gym deep in the woods, but we never go there because it's creepy with plants entangling it. What we do is eat food from the shelter her parents have made in case of war. We stick our fingers in frozen Cool-whip and the sticky juiced jars of pickles and olives. She has a yellow desk with a key. She's folding it down and presenting a miniature loaf of plastic bread. There's a tiny hole on the bottom of the bread. When I open my mouth at her command, she squeezes the bread and a rush of air comes into my mouth until I announce how good it tastes, how good the bread tastes, then she locks it up again. We pop aspirin because Tate's jaw is oddly swollen from the accident on the slide at school; it's like there's a small fist in her mouth. When we watch Elephant Man together she says with exuberance, "That's me...deformed."
CRUELTY

There was no need to jog beyond the sight of roses.

"Yeah...and what are you going to do about it?"
I saw that there was going to be a fight
between the woman in the army green tank
top and the man without a shirt.
They were playing rugby and their legs were covered in mud.
I left when the man pushed her to the ground.
I couldn't decide if it was good
that he shoved her like another man
or not. I jogged on.
A man was pulling weeds by the river.
I was sure that he would say "hello;"
in the next instant I was sure he would throw
the clod of weeds and dirt in my face.
I jogged on.
I ran by a house. It was Faulkneresque:
Woman, man, and child sat on the porch.
A dog chewed his grass in the front lawn.
The woman was just showered,
her hair knotted in a rose-colored towel.
I was sure that she smelled good,
like the synthetic scent
of flowered shampoo, gardenia or
rosemary; maybe nothingness like cactus.

"Hello, hello," I could stay with you forever.

The woman took the towel from around her hair and lashed
at the boy who jumped towards the dog.

I returned home and arranged my face in the mirror.
But basically I looked the part of
the sweaty jogger.

I took a shower. I must say I enjoyed
my body under water.
Sometimes this is not the case.
Sometimes it seems a chore to take
off clothes, to become clean again,
fresh-scrubbed and new.
BRIDGING STORIES

I've always been afraid of bridges--
I dream of bridges cracking, forgotten
bridges of childhood. The bridges of quaint
New England towns. But now I must tell a story
of a train charging across bridges at night. My lanky
friend and I could not sleep; we rose

and rolled out of bed. She wrapped a rose-
hued blanket around our legs. We felt the bridges
underneath as she peeled oranges and then poised her lanky
arms beside her ears as she braided her hair. Forgotten
strands got into her mouth as she talked. Her story:
At forty, her parents eat steak and potatoes. Quaint

American folk. But her father didn't used to be quaint.
He fought in a war (she's seen the uniform) and rose
in the military before leaving suddenly. Why? His story
is one of forgetfulness. Would he bridge
two countries or abandon one? Sylvia has forgotten
how to speak Chinese, although she recalls the lanky

bodies of women buying fish. I love the word lanky,
but Sylvia tries to drink "muscle-bulge," to not be quaint
or exotic or "chic-petite in Berkeley." Do rose
gardens appeal to her: the red of the flower of the forgotten
red of Chinese celebrations? The broken bridge
between two worlds troubles her, the missing stories.

We have our own stories.
Example: cross-country team, her lanky
legs sticking out of her uniform. We crossed the bridges
of Oakland and ran to the Mormon temple. Not a quaint
place, but gigantic and racist. We stopped for roses
and forbidden figs. Coach Patty was angry. We had forgotten

such things are timed. We had forgotten
we were jogging girls and not warrior women. Stories
rose from our mouths as we ran. We loved Jane Eyre--no rose-
bed for her either. Like Sylvia, she was small (not lanky),
but "small, plain and poor." We longed to romp on quaint
or earthy (we didn't know which ) moors in sweats. The bridge
from here to Oakland--there is none. I think of her lanky
legs (don't we get attached to details)? And the quaint handwriting in letters smelling of roses. A bridge.
JOURNEY

I've been traveling too long
through desert sand storms
mounted on this peacock,
this gypsy life...
I leave all my jewels behind
on the sand. I leave my cream
colored pearls for some nomad to find.
I leave my single diamond.
I will not forget the games I've learned.
The way to fold a ton of sand
through your fingers.
How to make water from plastic.
I leave behind my lipstick
and my plastic comb.
I leave behind my crystal.
I leave it all behind.
Throw off your hats.
Throw them in the sand.
And your boots covered with dust.
Covered with the grime from the compost pile.
Leave it all behind. And if not,
then check your golden watch.
Check the time. Is it time
for your medicine?

These children yell: and finally it is good.
They yell from the rooftops
and I want to say their dresses
lifting, lifting every part
checkered squares
or I want to say their dresses
lifting in the breeze
I want to say their dresses
lifting in the breeze.
Girls. Only. Not a boy
in sight within a mile playing
with masterful toys
lifting a gun and pointing,
pointing as they always will later
their gun at the girls
crouching down to get the coin
and skipping back, their backs precisely lined by the backbone, a perfect curve all right, oh yes catch it.
JACK AND Z

(1)
The future is there, sure,  
but the past expands and contracts  
depending on the day.  
Now it is opening with a hiss.  
The steam from the kitchen.  
The lemon fragranced towels.

I am digging into clear Japanese noodles.  
"The broth, "we agree, "is perfect."

We are sipping the broth of memory--  
it tastes faintly of blood.  
The salt  
from the sushi--  
fish eggs, flesh, and seaweed--  
is a gargling agent. We cleanse and spit  
bloated words. And the green paste is hot.  
We are telling tall tales.  
We are deciding on what past to keep  
and what past to invent.

(2)
Basically, we are talking of two men:  
Jack and Z

Jack is or was or is or was  
the kind of guy who kissed you  
when you least expected, needed,  
or wanted it.

(The pictures of his sisters  
had always astonished me,  
their thin bodies  
that I assumed had been nourished  
by rice.) Now I gorge on rice, sticky and clumpy,  
the kind of rice he would make on Sunday.

I tell a story: "Once he brought back a square  
of wood from his art class.  
I saw him jabbing at the pine
in his room
with his sort of determination.
Shavings splintered onto his red flannel sheets
(I had buried myself in these
a number of times while he was in class
in order to smell
his cucumber scent).

I had touched the curly, saw-dusty scraps,
had let them float over me.

He was drinking a glass of boiling water.
I was breathing in pine
on a corner of the bed
and thinking of the first time I saw him,
when he offered me a strawberry.
(Which I thought was a strange thing to
do, although it isn't very strange.)

And I saw my face emerge, cut
into that wood. He carved me
brushing my teeth; I recognized
the bathroom lamp and his jar
of Noxema. He had inscribed CREST
with precision. I could tell
by the way that he gauged
my eyes (one was cut
a bit too emphatically
and was crooked)
and hair
that it was a face
that he cared for."

Is that what love is?

And she tells a story:
about gifts
(I was jealous of the jade elephant
Z had given her; my jade gift was merely
a circle with a hole through it.)
and trips
to brothels ("everyone in Japan does this").
But I was most interested in the parents.

"At first they loved me.
His mother made peculiar fish soups.
She taught me how to cook with yellow radishes and how to pop a fish eyeball into my mouth with no problem. But then he told me I could spend the night at his house. His parents hated me after that.

But (and this is the essence of the whole thing), when we went traveling through Europe I was the one who got to speak. We carried all our clothes in this bag. (She pulls her handbag out from under the table. I had always wondered about this monster school bag.) He insisted on bringing plum jam with us. It made us sick and leaked all over the bag. We had a blast."

"But for me, it was a question of his not seeing his face in the mirror."

"All I know," she continues, "is that we wore the same sized shoe."

We drink luke-warm tea and swallow leaves. We feel like young girls, quickened by jump rope songs. We even decide on green tea ice-cream. Then we steal the bowls.

In the plum handbag, clanging against keys and change, the sticky bowls will be the only decent reminder of love when we leave this place.
WAITING FOR SUZANNE

"Suzanne takes you down,  
to her place near the river,  
you can hear the boats go by  
you can stay the night beside her"

--Leonard Cohen

I rode my bicycle over the island  
collecting the natural  
items--conch shells and nautilus  
with their spots of pink  
resembling breasts  
and then the more practical  
things--trash bags for getting caught  
in the rain, cat food. I stopped  
by my Aunt's house

then to the post office. No letters.  
I headed down to the steamboat  
wharf. It was true  
that I would be the oldest person  
hawking trinkets to tourists,  
but I could disregard this.

I had my wares in my backpack,  
the things I would sell--  
the jars of sea glass, the band aids,  
and the watches I'd stolen.

I put on my sunglasses and spread  
the junk over a tan blanket. I waited  
for customers. Predictably, the kid  
with the limp came  
and bought a small bag of raisins.

This was merely an annoyance  
because I was really selling strawberry  
chapstick, fishing hook  
bracelets, and the shells of  
horse-shoe crabs  
for Suzanne.  
All these things were wooing items.
I wasn't sure I could heighten her beauty with my objects, but I would try.

I held my breath as I saw Suzanne, but it wasn't her, only a woman with the same honey-colored hair.

I crossed my legs and weaved a small braid down one side of my head. I sang several songs (all the way through) to myself. I realized by ten with the moon out that she wasn't going to come.

The bag of raisins and a few sand dollars were all I had sold. I had pictured a sand dollar bleached-out and round in her hand, obscuring the infinite lines of her palm

not in the sticky hands of children. I pedaled softly home, the rough jewelry clinking in my backpack, singing her name.
THE LANDFILL

"this dew drop world
is a dew drop world
and yet, and yet"

Let's start with Mark Morris
(la. la. la. la.)
"fruity and coy, deliciously pot-bellied by beer,"
dancing along the Rhine.
He couldn't survive Germany,
and the ladies who tried to feed him pate
("place some weights on top of the pate
and refrigerate overnight, or up to two days.
NOTE: Caul fat is available in pork markets).3
They didn't appreciate his low-brow style,
his mockery of modern dance, his urge
to dress in drag. With bolero and boots
he waltzed all through Berlin, ignoring clues
that flamboyance wasn't respected
or needed or wanted.
Am Grunde des begrun deten Glaubens
liegt der unbergrundete Glaube.4

WOMAN IN ROLL BRIM HAT:
"Believe me, I read that"
WOMAN JOGGING BESIDE OUR HEROINE:
"I don't think loving too much is a sin"
WOMAN WHO SAW BOYZ IN THE HOOD:
"Marie, Marie, hold on to your hood"

Don't be saddened by this account,
in blustery winter
they must jog on like rare mares,
like wolves are at their heels.
You should not be saddened,

1 Haiku by Issa
2 This is a line from my own poem "Who owns the dance"
3 from Marhta Stewart's Hors d'Oeuvres, Clarkson N. Potter Inc. New York, 1984
4 "Any reasonable person behaves like this," Wittenenstein, Lectures and Conversations
5 from Eliot's "The Wasteland"
there is nothing to it, merely a movie name and a green fleece hat from a catalogue that cost $98,00. Weep no more, woeful, shepherds, weep no more.  

the mittens half-buried in snow. i can no longer wear them; they chafe my stumps. i remember the fields in Ohio, when we settled into the corn and touched fingers. now more than ever seems it rich to die, to melt into the snow, smelling yellow corn and ripening cantaloupes. imagining the liquid highway leading to the red barn. you on your daily jog. the summer of wisteria, my virgin summer when the newspaper in the back of your car turned yellow: "SUMMER IS A HIT." right before my accident.

It was the nightingale and not the lark that pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear. Her ear was strung with charms of rubies dark that caught her hair that never had been sheared. I hummed her songs, but feared that my strange voice would not delight her cochlea, nor one precious bone in her body. Then my choice was to bellow: "girls just want to have fun," but I didn't feel that this was fun. It was all misery to me. My wasteful words would never woo this woman. And yet does the ear solace itself in peevish birds. So let the seagulls eat the scraps of fish, those bones she places on her little dish.

Asa no kohee wa nomimasen ka?

---

6 From Milton's "Lycidas"
7 from Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale"
8 This comes from Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom, it was the wisteria summer for the old spinster Rosa Coldfield
9 from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet
10 from Wallace Steven's "The Man on the Dump"
11 "Would you like to have morning coffee with me?"
I am the woman selling clogs at Oggs,
I am the raccoon stealing your trash and cash,
I am the one who sighs most,
    is cruelest...12
I am the pressing, passing pastor,
I am the egocentric, eco-feminist with my luggers,13
    or the Guatemalan refugee with her caitos, 14
I am the person dying of AIDS,
I am the person jumping off the bridge,
I am the author, struggling to write a canzone.
I am the boy who cannot paint what then I was15

memory like
the cracked nut16
    reveals something true,
    something soft and fortifying

do not grieve
over the goldengrove unleaving17
unless you are a child
still playing with watercolors

the cherry blossom
wallpaper will not
leave us to our misery

HEALTH
A remedy for sickness suggests rare
basoon recordings. One listens to tones.
One languishes in robes and chews on pears,
or sips brothy sukiyaki to scare
away the spirits. One finds over there
One finds solace in refinishing chairs--
one can find a chair in a dumpster, bare
of fabric, rotting. One fixes it up.

12 Donne, "A Valediction: Of Weeping"
13Luggers are "work boots" sold by J. Crew for app. $100.00
14 Caitos are sandals that Guatemalans wear
15Wordsworth
16The "Cracked Nut" is a ballet choreographed by Mark Morris, it is a ribald
   imitation of "The Nutcracker."
17Hopkins
This is therapy. Chair-apy. Or sup
on wild goose with marmalade. One dares
not be too greedy, though. One must show care
and respect and agility. The sick
are weak. One knows how to defend and kick.
All right, all right—all robes off.
The bath houses are open again.
Don't shove, the scare is over,
the things you most fear have vanished.
Prime Minister Mori Hiro Hosokawa
even danced in the nude.
He's healthy. Boy George is healthy.
Annie Lennox-shit,
she's the healthiest chick around.
I didn't know she could come back
with her water turtle.

(I was down on the beach and I saw
with my own eyes Jesus. And he
wasn't alone. He was with twenty-eight
other guys, twenty-eight young men
and all so friendly.)

(I was beside myself.
Having had a taste of wabasabi,
my eyes were watering. I had to pull out
my blue scarf. I could barely contain
myself. You did not help. Your story
alone could make me cry.

After great pain,
a formal feeling comes.
I was able to recollect myself
and only a bit of eyeliner smeared.)

(I was running to mama,
she had clothes pins in her mouth,
she was hanging up our underwear.
I was running to mama,
she was cooking us beans
and laughing along with the radio.
I was running to mama,

---

18 This, of course, is from Whitman
19 Emily Dickinson
she was gone and I could not find her).

There upon she released a knot
and released a green silk belt
from about her waist.20 Her beauty
unfolded. I realized that
"the function of this crafts-woman
was therefore"21 to entice me.
Bold was hir face and fair and reed
of hewe.22 I couldn't resist her.
Say, what strange motive, Goddess! could
compel a well-bred lord to
assault a gentle belle?23 I got
a swatch of her hair and smelled
it: rose scented. I would put it
now in a ring forever.
"She is more precious than rubies:
and all things thou canst desire
are not to be compared unto her."24

"I read the news today, oh, boy,"
came across the radio.
A wild man on a spree, killing
four and wounding thirty.

We drink another Bloody Mary
and read the profile of this man:
"inclined to or exhibiting assertiveness,
hostility or combativeness."25

I also will laugh at your calamity,
will mock you when your fear cometh.26
I use the paper for cleaning glass,
to see out of my quiet Alcatraz.

A sign in the window says, "you must pay
before you get gas."

---

20 from "Sir Gawain and the Green Night"
21 My version of encountering technical language, literary criticism
22 Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales," wife of Bath
23 Pope: "The Rape of the Locke"
24 Proverbs: 3:15
25 definition of belligerent
26 Proverbs
I get bloody gas on my hands.
The Koran says, "be blessed."

Could I kill something, a person perhaps? Could I survive a battle?
Lie low underneath a bunker?
I read the news today:

It told me to get ready to fight.
My friends and I got nicely drunk.
We put on our gray uniforms and went to a ball. I saw Angie there.

I wanted to love her badly before I left.
I was thinking the worst about what might happen to me.
"Angie, will you wait?"
TRAVEL

This was a Swiss chalet and they had a goat; we were greedy in our AMERICANESS, stripping on the mountain, begging the Italian couple to let us take their room, gulping down soup in Amsterdam. And on the train on the way to Berlin we snuck in boy, it was fun, into first class. And guess what? There were two other couples there. I said slumber party, the Russian lady giggled. The Asian woman’s hand reached up and brought down some home-canned jam, some unrecognizable red berries; she scraped the bottom and gave us some on our old bread. I snuggled up to everyone with my legs stretched then curved.
ARBORETUM

My aunt has a thing for the swans in the Arboretum.

We have been playing (oh, God) CROQUET.
Her garden blooms

with flowers I cannot name and in the pool floats a device for holding drinks.

My suit has spilled its green into the chlorine and now exists, gray as fog.

Until dinner time, we sit on plastic chairs and my aunt holds her camera below the straw hat: smile, smile, smile.

My stomach rises, a pale unpregnant bulge.

Midnight, the three of us leave Uncle to his model planes. We wander through the gate, over wet-blackened grass (my aunt in her white robe, her hair ragged and wet, her feet bare like a girl's)...

into the Arboretum. And by the swans the three of us stand, staring at the mossy stones that cannot reflect the perfect white swans.
PEARL & LUTHER

The last time we were together we took care of two dogs--Pearl and Luther.

Pearl was big, black, and dumb, but very, very nice.

Luther was a Beagle who incessantly climbed on Pearl, but she only wanted her treats.

I should say that Luther was regal, elitist in a way.

In fact, while we were there, we got this call: "I'm interested in having my dog mate with Luther..."

The house was musty; it had been built before the American Revolution and around there you could go for old-fashioned ice-cream every night in daisy walled parlors.

Upstairs, there were no wastebaskets so you always had to climb down to the kitchen.

The garden was exquisite and she had a place for fixing up birds, a shelter in the corner.

And there were also calls for that: "A robin has just flown into my window; I believe her wing is broken..."

The woman's name was Elizabeth. The guy's name was Kevin. They didn't believe in TV's or sofas or any sort of thing that would allow one to lounge, no this was straight from Puritans except for the bed, which was huge, it smelled nice up there. Of course a comforter that was red and the bed was low to the floor.
I looked through Elizabeth's dresses
and you wore Kevin's shoes to dinner,
the night we saw the horror movie
and I held your hand.

One day we went swimming with the dogs in the pond.
We could get in the back way for free.
The dogs came, too.
There were so many people there, milling in the water.

When we got out, we were covered in a fine silt
that the dogs just licked right off.
"...We're going to get to that place we really wanna go
And we'll walk in the sun
But til then, tramps like us, baby
We were born to run"

-Bruce Springsteen
We went there in the fall
when we barely knew each other.
I think it must have been October.
The day we left, was my friend's birthday
and I gave him a travel alarm
and told him I was doing things for myself.
We listened to Dylan and I listened to your stories.
This was back when I thought I had no stories
or anything to give you.

First there was Libby and the man in the bar
who said he would drive us to Yaak.
Then there was the long winding road from Libby.
When we found Yaak, it was dark
and just what I expected: a store and bar.
Except, in the bar there happened to be a band playing.
And a man who kicked his legs up in a jig.
I went out for cigarettes in the car and broke your key.
I thought, perhaps, that we were through.
But you had another key.
Then the long drive back to Libby
when we shouldn't have been driving.
And then sleeping in the hotel with you
for the first time.
PHILIPSBURG

I felt you, tender beneath the gray blanket.  
We were in the sullen mode of love  
and your hands would press against my thigh  
and we'd kiss all through the night...  
There was nothing to stop us.

They gave us the silver key to the room  
without asking for a thing.  
We had no money, but used the last checks  
for beer and green apples.  
And we placed these on a towel  
on top of the old carpet.

I will not forget that room  
with its flowered spread  
and the snow falling outside or  
us lying down greedily.  
And I will not forget the way you  
looked at me when I two-stepped  
with the town drunk  
and you called me a whore.  
What happened then seems crazy:  
Back in our room where a few hours before  
we had loved each other,

we fought like the insane. I hit you once hard.  
I took all the blankets off your body.  
You curled in a corner of the bed shivering,  
your long naked body, pale... I felt so sad for you.  
But it wasn't like this.  
Because soon I came back to bed  
and drew all the blankets around you  
and smelled your tequila skin  
and we rushed for each other.

By three o'clock a.m. you finally got the cold  
that had been bothering you for days.

But the next day was so bright,  
we should have worn sunglasses.  
And we watched the dogs run across the snow.
BUTTE

It seemed to be our honeymoon:
we left on Friday afternoon and knew
that our friends would call and later complain.
This did not matter.

You drove and I wore your baseball hat
backwards because this was my life
gone a different route, not backwards,
but I felt heady from the cigarettes,
and you called it my "wild girl" phase.

Eddy's room cost us $30.00 and Eddy had a big
scar running down his face.
There was a zig-zagged red line in neon
underneath EDDY outside.
Our room smelled of Lysol and I breathed it in.

We ate our dinner at the Red Rooster
and our waitress was a hunched-back giant
in black who used a cart to wheel our food.

That night we just lay in Eddy's bed,
curled around each other.

The next morning I got up first and moved the chair
away from the door and walked out into the freshest
day ever, I had never felt so good.
Two women were coming to clean our room
and the Indian woman told me
that she liked my shoes.
I crossed the highway
to get us coffee, but there was none.

We left Eddy's by noon.
We stopped at some places, but mostly drove;
I'm sure now it's deep in our minds: the copper mines,
the depleted houses sagging, and the gray, dull sky...

In your and my mind, somehow.

We looked in windows of the Copper King's mansion.
Then we ate Chinese food downtown.
You wondered at these stranded people in Butte, the plump, Chinese woman in red with her head bent over a newspaper.
FLATHEAD LAKE 1

What did you look for
Were the questions answered
Over the gray snow we walked
Do you recall the gray snow
What do you call the woman who sings all day
Did she lean out of the balcony
Could you hear the saxophone
What pleasure are you looking for
And then we walked along the lake
The day remained still
Is this written down
Do you remember the whole of it
Did it feel too contained
If this is just a joke...
The moon poured light on her slender legs
We had to walk for miles down the lonely beach
What were you looking for
There were several reasons
And then, you see, it started to snow so badly, we were forced to stay
Why did you lie like a child
Don't you see that she was crying
This is just one place they went to

There was the hotel room by the lake, the view of the still water, the balcony they leaned over as they talked, and the waitress who forgot the pepper

And then he went back to bed or smoked a cigarette in the chair or stayed up the whole night gazing at stars, so distant, he thought

And then she went back to bed

And the snow continued to fall on the lake

Yes, the snow continued to fall
FLATHEAD LAKE 2

Things had taken so many turns for the worse, I just wanted us to drink enough so that we would be happy. Every room was too expensive.

We settled for whore hotel. Smelling again of Lysol like Eddy's. There was a tiny fridge for our cocktails--too many, outside, wandering, drunk, he had his shades on. Mexican food that night he hid in the bedroom. I looked everywhere. Why was he teasing? Even outside in my bathrobe.

He popped out from behind the door. "Why did you look at yourself so many times in the mirror when you were looking for me?" It was true.

Perhaps, I wanted to make sure, I was still there.

The next day, walking by the lake. "Why are you so dreamy," he asks. He watches the teenage girls stroll by in a bored way--three of them: pretty, prettier, prettiest:

he analyzes them all...
VACATION SPOT

A little piece of heaven.
Hot Springs, that we reached after walking through the snow.

Naked on the cold March day beneath the springs.

Then we found the vacation spot--rows of empty cabins,
over-looking a rushing creek.
One used for white water rafting.
We were the only ones there at this time of year, but for some odd reason, the owner kept the hot tub on.
We left our little cabin and went to the tub.

For the second time that day.
Took off our clothes.
Was this different?
RED LION

The last hotel was the Red Lion in Missoula.

It was a summer day
when we met at the birthday party
(the southern girl's layered cake);
we danced to Frank Sinatra.

I think of movies:
a laughing woman
bending towards a bed.

At the party we snuck and kissed
around the corner of the house
after you said you had never read

*Madame Bovary.* We fell
to the street, my Roman sandals
ruined, my yellow blouse stained
with grass. Some hippie children
walked by and laughed, you said
*so soft, so soft, so soft*
when we lay in bed.
We were greedy then.

The next day you gave me the scrap
of yellow paper with your name.
I watched you unlock
your bicycle from our gate...

But now...the couple from New York dunk
their baby in the hot tub.
She squeals and the woman sings to her.

I talk to a lady from New Jersey
on the plastic chairs.

The man from New York says,
"Honey, do you want a drink?"

There is a problem with room
service and I go to the desk in slippers.
All night we watch TV on the king sized bed. We do not touch...

We do not talk...
The next day we drive the half mile home.
Leaving New Haven

"I added pressed flowers until after a time
I had a good collection. The asphodel,
forebodingly, among them. I bring you,
reawakened, a memory of those flowers."
-William Carlos Williams
Sometimes I think the only reason I left Berkeley was because I wanted to take a trip cross country. I could not realize a destination, but I could see the traveling through Utah, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, and my home state, Ohio. I wanted to feel that sort of drowsy, liquid languor that you get from tons of driving. All I could see when I waved good-bye to my friends were the miles ahead of us. I gave no concern to the fact that I would eventually have to arrive.

There is nothing superior in my mind to staying in a hotel. All my life, I've loved driving in a car, even when I was stuffed between my parents; but this was better because I was doing it with a man. This trip felt like a carefully choreographed yet thrilling plot that I had created with room for improvisation.

I like Hopper paintings and the sort of loneliness they evoke, as if the man or woman in the painting is the last creature on earth. I imagined that the trip would make me feel Hopper-esque in a sense, displaced and I would shed many layers. I regarded the virgin space of a hotel room as carrying infinite possibilities. The sparsely decorated room, the predictable items: chair, table, TV, Bible, ice bucket thrilled me to no end.

Sometimes during the trip I would suddenly wonder if we were suited for each other. I would feel jumpy, like my heart was pulsing a false sort of blood, but yet it was blood and it would keep me going. My boyfriend kept on wanting to get root beer floats from Dairy Queen. For some reason I found this annoying and charming at the same time.
Why something sickly sweet, child-drink, when we could get loaded on alcohol? (Not a very safe proposition I know.) And sometimes we fought over what music to listen to. He wanted Donna Summers, his idol, but I wanted something more morose. In fact, this issue was always a problem with us. He wanted to disco and be happy; I wanted to feel weighty and burdened, like Morrissey who whined about everything. When we thought about creating ourselves, we had different ideas.

Much to my surprise (because I was still full of a floating sensation that compelled me not to think of the future), we arrived in New Haven, Connecticut on an August night. I see my mint green Honda and my cat meows and complains in the back seat as we turn onto streets that will become familiar, eat burgers at a tight little bar where we wonder if all the waiters are queer. Or I should say, he had arrived with his plethora of school boy shorts and Gap sweaters for another fall of graduate school.

2) There is a reading room at Yale. A calm room with masculine chairs. Beefy, green classic chairs that perhaps George Bush had sat in. I wasn't a student, but I would wait for my boyfriend to meet me in that room. I would look at the globes, spin them around in a melancholy fashion, repeating a Joyce Carol Oates line that always seemed to reoccur to me: "Where would I rather be? At a party with Marion?" Or I would creep out into the Shakespeare garden and fall to the grass and watch the librarians, eating snacks out of paper bags. Or I would watch the "diverse student body" assemble their notes, spread themselves out on the large wooden tables as if these notes were maps to a life, as if these notes were the topographies of these students' minds with green and yellow ridges
saying you can become. And I would wait for my lover to whisk me away.

Perhaps this lover was working out at the gym that day and he would arrive, hot and flushed in one of his tank tops to lead me home.

We lived in an eloquent, old Victorian house. The street we lived on was called Mansfield (I always thought of Jane Austin's Mansfield Park.) It wasn't like Mansfield Park, however. In fact it had an appropriate nickname: "Manslaughter," although it could look cheerful during the day. But we had a beautiful home. Our walls were salmon. I liked to write that home. ("Dear Mom: You'll never guess that your daughter has salmon colored walls.") We had our coffee maker and our garlic press. We had a big bed that we'd brought with us all the way from Chicago, our marital bed, except that we weren't married. Besides the salmon, our living room was lined with Victorian wall paper, stripes in green and pink. A large iron-legged bathtub stood in the bathroom awaiting midnight baths. Besides this, our crazy wig-wearing landlord had loaned us heavy pieces of antique furniture. (We decided Bruce had problems; he already had his law degree, but now he was going to become a psychiatric doctor.) He gave us a beautiful cherry wood dinner table on which we would cover the deep water stain with roses and serve our friends elaborate meals.

There was even a gourmet grocery shop a few blocks away where we could buy food that I loved. I remember a dark, Rubinesque Italian woman with fat fists who would grab a ripe tomato and yell out for the price and I remember the mozzarella cheese in little clumps that she would dish up and give to me in a plastic bag. And then there was the jazzy pancake house that we would go to on Sunday mornings. The
owner's paunchy belly (covered in a Jazz fest tee-shirt) would lean into our table as he poured us coffee. He would bring us potatoes, deep fried with scallions sprinkled on top. And, of course, there would be jazz playing and a beautifully intellectual crowd. There would be the possibility of Yale professors like Harold Bloom, in a rough coat walking through the streets arriving at places like these. Except I never saw him.

On Friday nights we would go to the graduate student disco-bar. My friend Michelle would always attract the Irish men and I would watch her in amazement, amazed at the skillful talk that seemed to flow from her so easily. Like an actress, her voice would rise in falsetto or turn solidly flat; she could mimic people so perfectly.

At this point in my life, I'll tell you that I felt a part of it, whatever it is...

(But then again I didn't. How miserable I was at the temp job I had, signing people up for cable. I was the only white girl there and I would push the point by bringing in Jane Austin novels to read between cable complaints. I did not know that cable was it, the world for some people. I did not know that life could revolve around the boxing matches that cost a hundred dollars for Pay per view. During my lunch break I would sit on the church steps around the corner from the cable company (for I figured the Lord would protect me there) and eat my cheese sandwich amidst New Haven gloom. During this time I wrote poems full of complaint and loftiness that I would stuff into my glove compartment. (I didn't exactly think that this was a romantic thing to do.) Although I fancied myself as different from everyone there, of course, I wanted to belong. I did odd things: There was a woman I became semi-close to named Debbie. I became interested in her life with
her small son and lent her my oversized, autographed copy of a *Barbar* book. She moved to South Carolina and I never got it back. Ironically, you read articles now, claiming how insidiously Babar gently condones French Imperialism.... some such thing.)

Our friends would get mugged. Once when our friend Sue was walking home at night, she saw a man running over the roof of a house with a meat tenderizer. A few steps later and there was a dead man in her path, with blood streaming or trickling out of his mouth (who knows?) Another friend was stopped on our street and had to lie on the sidewalk while the mugger circled around him like a vulture and blew two bullets close to his head when he didn't have any money (he lied and gave the mugger the wrong pin number when he took his cash machine card.)

We woke to the sound of the basketball, pounding on the pavement at five am. and at night we went to bed to the echoing of shots. At first we used to duck and huddle as if we expected a bullet to come flying in the window, but after a while we just got used to it. We ate to the sound of the radio and to the sound of Connie from downstairs yelling at her daughter or boyfriend. This we would hear, rising up our legs from the vent in the kitchen along with the deep frying smell of fish. This could be comical. Connie could be comical with her red velvet drapes and her elaborate ruffled shower curtains. But it could also be depressing like when she knocked poor old Bruce against the wall.

Connie was irresponsible. We figured that Bruce was scared of her because he complained about her and yet he didn't seem to be able to get her out. Bruce had given the house-hold order to get our gas from Connecticut gas, but Connie got her friends to deliver the gas because it
was cheaper. I came home one day and there was the heady smell of fumes, spilled gas all over the basement. Bruce thought he came to the rescue with the salt shaker—he sprinkled it on the cement to cover up the noxious fumes while we sat in the car. For Bruce there was one way of doing things. When we moved in we had to spread the staircase walls with newspaper in case our furniture nudged against the wallpaper. For Connie, life was without this rigidity, resounding with noise and commotion.

There was an abandoned boat next door that the kids in our neighborhood would play in. God, it looked fun to romp through that boat, that boat sitting high and dry on the weeds, glass, and debris of next door. I would sit on the toilet and watch the kids and long to be them.

And if you were to look at abandonment, there was an abandoned gun factory down the street from us. This building was huge and ominous. It reminded me of a Dr. Seuss kind of factory, so big and terrible that it seemed surreal. Although you couldn't buy a gun from there anymore, it seemed as if you could, for walking by this gigantic structure was asking for it. At the same time, there were the Yale students with their guns...

3) Hal. Hal was a law student. He had a fax and a power book, a house full of tropical plants, and Sandy. And he had one more thing: a licensed gun hidden beneath a leather jacket so he could walk through the streets of New Haven safely.
I knew Sandy because we were both attached to men who were going to school there. We had other things in common, but I forget what they were now. All I know is I thought Sandy was styling in an East Coast way I found irresistible. Of course, Sandy and Hal had much more money than us. I mean they were very, very rich like Hal's parents did something that made his family known and he had been raised by nannies (which was why he was so f---up, or so he said.) Their apartment proved this with the new Stair Master set before the TV. Often when I would go over to visit Sandy, Hal would be working out on the machine, manically pumping his legs. They both worked out a lot, Sandy explained, because they used to be heroine addicts. Of course this seemed romantic to me at the time. Sandy's mother was insane, literally in an institution, so this was another thing we could talk about for hours in her apartment. Once I went over there before spring break and Sandy was madly packing bags and doing laundry. She and Hal were going on a scuba diving cruise for spring break in Bali! Of course Hal wasn't helping Sandy with any of these chores, being too eagerly engrossed in his exercising. I remember how odd I thought this was, to take such an extravagant vacation for such a short time. But Sandy was nice. When she came back from this trip, she wrapped a purple seeded necklace around my neck.

The play was called "Someone Who'll Watch Over Me." Hal, Dave, Sandy, and I were all going to see it. I didn't know much about the play, but I just wanted it all to work out with this other couple. Although we usually took the train into New York, Hal insisted that we drive in his new Camry. What I remember of the trip there is Hal driving about 90 while he talked on the car phone, trying to secure reservations for
dinner. The windows were down and he kept calling back to us, asking if we preferred this or that restaurant. I hadn't heard of any of his suggestions, but tried to fake it.

Cursing, Hal put the car phone back in its cradle. They were having trouble hearing him, although he was shouting. I was having trouble hearing because the windows were all down. Finally we got to New York and settled in a modest place after all—a Chinese restaurant.

We ordered our food then Hal asked us if we wanted to play a game. I thought it was tacky to play a game during dinner, but didn't want to appear disagreeable so I said OK. Since then I have learned the danger of "Truth" games. Basically the purpose, Hal said, was to get to know each other better. Dave and I took swallows of beer, Here we go...

The first questions seemed pretty normal, the usual sex questions, "Where is the oddest place you've had sex?," for example. But as we played with Hal and Sandy, one thing started to become apparent: they had done everything and Dave and I had done nothing. Hal and Sandy had both: had sex with someone of the same sex and had eaten their own shit. Hal had shot someone with his gun. He informed us that when he had played Truth with law students, almost everyone in the room had claimed to be directly responsible for a person's death. That, he informed us, was why they were clever enough to be lawyers. I remember Dave just cracking up that both of them had eaten their own feces; in fact, we were both giggling. And yet, Dave later said, that although surely they were exaggerating, it all came down to the fact that they found their lives so thrilling.

After the play Hal convinced us to go to a fancy hotel where we watched boxing. In between rounds, women in lacy undergarments
paraded the number of the round on cardboard. They wore high heels and looked just like Playboy bunnies. Blood streamed out of the noses of the boxers. As time went on, I felt sickened and yet I couldn't help myself from cheering when a boxer got riled up like an animal let loose. Hal had no problems watching the violence. He sat back in the folding chair, his large body draped over it, his jeans too tight on his thick over-exercised thighs. His face was dark and swarthy. I guess that's how to say it, with bumpy sort of pock-marked skin, black eyes and hair. "YEAH....GO....GET HIM," he yelled from his seat two rows in from the action.

From the play to boxing to dessert in the Village... I was exhausted but Hal wanted more. He dragged us to a diner. There he asked us if we liked caviar. Sure, I said. Then he said we should all stay in a hotel that night. Of course, Dave and I couldn't afford it and meekly said we had to go home. It was three when we left. All the way home, Hal talked. He wouldn't stop. Even Sandy seemed tense. He would ramble from politics to Yale to heroine. I was the only person in the car responding, just saying yes, yes as he kept the car coasting at ninety. At one point he turned full around back to face us in the back seat, "Do you know," he said, "that I could just swerve off the road any time and kill all of us." None of us said anything; we just cruised in an amazed silence.

Surely Hal hasn't killed anyone and yet he would be the type to get away with it. But Dave said later, that the night changed him: it was more that he realized he wanted to experience the unfamiliar.

Unlike Hal, there were the Yale students without guns who got killed. And then there were the Yale buildings themselves that you
could only enter if you had a key. It was like entering a castle, those big
gates, slowly opening, leaving the filth of New Haven behind to enter
intellectual security or inquiry or whatever. And outside those gates
there would be the same people day after day asking you for money,
calling you a fag if you refused to hand over a dime. I was tight fisted. I
didn't want anyone to have my money, except for the woman who
would creep up to me in the parking lot sometimes.

4) I mention the gym that my lover would go to before picking me up at
the library. He started going there every day for hours to swim. I should
have known there was a problem, that there was something to this
besides the mere excuse of wanting a better body.

We would work out together in the apartment. We had an exercise
video that we would play together and bounce about. How I hated this.
I always felt so wimpy, putting on stupid gear just to look good in my
own home exercising. After working out, I always wanted to roll around
on the floor all sweaty and passionate. I thought that this was how
things were done. There was one draw back: our carpet stunk. We
would get big balls of cat hair stuck to our sweaty behinds and our backs
would get sore. Eventually we stopped working out together.

Life went along smoothly as I got various jobs from working at an
all-night diner to a factory. Meanwhile, I volunteered in a New Haven
school so I was feeling pretty good about exposing kids to poetry (and
they wrote some exceptional poems about life and death) until one
fateful winter night. Because there had been a big commotion circling
around this movie, we decided to see The Crying Game. Did you see this
movie? What did you think? Did you know the secret? There is a woman in the movie, a beautiful black singer that the hero falls in love with, but (surprise!) she is really a man.

After the movie we walked home through the chilly February night. We came home and started in on our night routine. Brush your teeth, wash your face, and get into bed. No children yet, but we knew all their literary-allusion names: Emma Rose was going to be the first (I thought Emma was a lucky, warm Jane Austin-heroine name.)

I snuggled into bed, under our luxurious covers, feathers with flowers covering the feathers. For some reason my boyfriend was taking a long time in his study. Sometimes he liked to stand by his books and take one down that he hadn't looked at for a while. I figured that he was doing this (later I learned that he had stood paralyzed in the doorway, unable to move forward into the hall or back into the study.)

Finally he came in the room. His eyes were odd. He looked at me..."Sally..."


I'm sure you know the routine, the dance of confession.

Becka? Sue? Hopefully not Kelly, the dark-haired girl who rolls her own cigarettes and is frankly stunning? (Much later I would see Kelly getting into a taxi at a conference in Chicago. I knew by then that she was living in England, had actually married an English man, but the moment was so odd for some reason and made me incredibly sad. She had a red scarf and wore high heels. I doubt she would have remembered me, but there she was in her full beauty, possibly going back to the hotel where her husband was, but for that moment, very herself, very alone.)
"I'm not completely straight." Leave it to him to be subtle.

What it came down to was a locker room scene at the gym. What I wonder is, if he hadn't chosen Yale, the only school he got into...the gay center of the East Coast, except for New York and Providence. I go over the scene in the locker room.

I don't have to imagine it because I have made him describe it in detail and I can go to it any time I like, like a scratch I can itch and itch and love that blood. What of men in locker rooms? How do I know? The water blasting, the steam, the green corridors. The glazed eye contact between men as they rub soap on themselves? Why wouldn't two men experience love there? And then a mutual masturbation scene, right outside the locker doors. And kissing even. That is the worst, the kissing. I try to imagine this in a woman's gym, but our bodies seem too private, too inside and yet maybe it is possible. Maybe it is even beautiful in its rawness.

And so many of my best friends always being gay and me being fascinated, loving the stories, encouraging as if to mock marriage even as I had succumbed to the fact that I too would be married. All this until it happened, as they say, to me.

The Crying Game. We cried all weekend. We tried to make it pleasant with walks along the beach holding hands and a picnic hike through a park, but there was a sense of desperation. I couldn't believe that he could talk about Emily Dickinson and his favorite, Henry James, when I just wanted to burn all those books, all that theory, all that shit. Is this what all that literature had brought us to, all those passages that we felt so on top of; and yet we could not even determine the meaning of our lives?
The next Monday, it was class as usual for my boyfriend. He left at his normal time. I called in sick to work and literally hunted for him on the Yale campus. I thought his class was in a particular room, but when I got there all the students were gone. I ripped down a sign for a reading. I wanted to sabotage Yale that had led him to this conclusion, through theory, through sophistication, through the banality of words on a page in a book. For that's why I thought he was gay. I thought it was a political move, as fresh and ripe for him as opening up a new book and smelling the pages. And besides that, what of all the gay theory floating around campuses right now? What of *The Epistemology of the Closet*, that brilliant book on gay theory that had passed through all of his friend's hands?

For him, it was a mystery unraveled. He wanted to announce his new identity to the world. He was, as I tearfully said to my mother, "Euphoric!"

5) I finally moved out after more months than you would think possible. I moved in with a woman from Germany named Dorothea, an anthropologist, with the most beautiful red hair I'd ever seen and her own peculiar men problems: it was a triangle between her and Oliver from Germany and her visiting professor from Africa. She studied Africa. When she could convince me to, I would climb to East Rock and overlook New Haven. It was spring then summer and we would tan and read up on the hill.

And still I saw Dave every day and we would complain or decide to have sex or do just whatever struck our fancy at the moment
(a silly way to live, no doubt.) At his birthday party, there were the straight people and his new-found gay friends. It was Easter Sunday and Dorothea and I had colored eggs with dye and had rolled them on the braided carpet to amuse the cats earlier in the day. Now I was in my favorite salmon kitchen, feeling weepy. A blonde guy he was sleeping with engaged me in conversation. We both stared at Dave in the dining room, surrounded by flowers, presents and friends. "He looks delicious," my companion said. This was enough and yet I did not leave. I went through the motions of being at a party; I even went to eat Chinese noodles with them late in the evening. I wanted to encourage him to sleep with men and to "find himself," just as I wanted to kill him.

6) Matt, a serious scholar who could annoy people with a certain elitism, had an annual hot tub party every spring. Although by now Dave and I were no longer seen as a couple (well, we kind of were), we went together. It took us a while to drive to Greenich, but the people with us discussed the bridge column in the paper. We pulled in the drive of a gigantic house. The first thing we saw were black cooks in white hats preparing food. My friend Steve and I looked at each other, what is going on? Were they permanent employees or had they been hired to cook for a graduate student dinner? Should we go to this? I looked over at Maria, a third year, lounging by the pool in a sleek black suit with a gold band around her neck. Was this wailish intellectual perfection? I felt completely out of my element.

There were three hot tubs on the premises. I scooted into the pool in my green bikini and stayed in the pool until my suit was bleached a
dull gray. While I was in the tub a guy came and sat down next to me. *Hello, hello,* I thought in my head, *my boyfriend's gay, but here we are together.* Yes, *that's right and I'm lonely, but I really just cannot talk to anyone, hence sitting in this tub for hours at a time. I know it can't be good for my skin, but my mind is feeling good, soggy and depleted and good.*

Blah, blah, blah, he said to me, worked in New York City.

"And so, what do you do?" I asked.

"And so, I work for Johnson and Johnson."

"And so, what do you do there?"

"Well, I work in the Tampax section."

This really cracked me up. And it felt little too intimate. The first man I decide to have a post-boyfriend conversation with and he ends up dealing with my insides. Not mine, specifically, but all I could think about was my period and blood filling up the hot tub. I felt a little guilty because I hate tampon companies for how expensive they are so I started to hate him.

Matt's mother kept hovering about us, hoping that we would enjoy the party and begin to appreciate Matt. This scene only depresses me as I write it and yet I am fascinated by it also. Rumor has it that some Congressman called to ask advice while we were there.

After the dinner (I couldn't choke down any charred meat), there was a magic show and slides in the drawing room. The guy's name who performed the magic had a name close to Merlin or maybe it was Merlin; he also worked for a tampon company. He was after a woman named Grace and presented the birds and the attached scarves for her pleasure. Matt's sister had just been on an African safari. She was an odd woman
and at one point she peered into my face and said, "Matt needs warmth." I have thought that line quite often. I don't know why. Her slides were displayed under glass with a lamp, lighting up the tigers and zebras. There were no pictures of people.

Yes, it was the kind of decadent, Fitzgerald world I had always wanted to enter. We even ended up playing bridge in the hot tub, with Merlin hovering about us in his bathing suit ready to perform card tricks. (Our bridge playing is another story; we became consumed with it: hot summer nights we wore dresses and baked pies and drank gin and tonics and played bridge. To all hours. I mean until the sun rose and we were still mumbling *three hearts, three spades*... If we weren't playing bridge, we were doing tarot card readings for each other: is he gay or straight, cards? And the answers varied depending on how we interpreted the swords, circles, water, and planets. I would practically faint if a lot of men on horseback appeared for his reading.)

On the way back from the party, my boyfriend started to get a little upset. I felt embarrassed because I had followed the Tampon Man into a certain room at the back of the house. For some reason, he could be gay, but I still had to be devoted. The people driving in the car with us covered their ears and looked out the windows. What was my life becoming?

We dropped the people off; still drunk and slightly dressed up (I had put on heels and a yellow linen dress over my bikini), we parked the car in the usual spot in front of our house.

A boy in a blue parka shuffled down the street. Suddenly, instead of feeling queasy, I felt tense. The boy did not look friendly, with the hood of his jacket hiding his face. I had my little tear gas sprayer, but I
didn't want to use it. My boyfriend looked at me in an odd way: "How come you're not locking the door to the car?" (Because I want to get the hell up to our house, I thought). "Oh, I'm just tired," I said brightly and loudly. We started to walk towards our house. The shuffling boy shuffled past us and I felt relief. But then he must have decided. He turned around, his boyish face questioning as he asked, "Give me your money."

Instead of, pleasantly handing over our wallets, both of us took off. We ran towards the house. I tripped and fell on the ground because I wasn't used to wearing heels and then a gun was in my face. Would the bullets start going? What exactly would they feel like? Would it be a real pain or just a sort of numbness? I threw my wallet in the air and my credit cards spilled like graffiti on the dark grass. He didn't seem to care and ran towards the money.

And how does literature work its way into this for me? As things got worse with Dave, I turned more and more to poetry. In the midst of this messy affair that had gone awry, I started to have an affair with a poet, Mark Strand. This is not so unusual. All my life I have been grabbing at books to keep me whole. As a child I turned to Nancy Drew and as I got older to Lord Jim and J.D. Salinger. I had an affair with Salinger and yearned to be one of his women, painting her toenails or talking on the phone.

I didn't know what Mark Strand called me to do. His women were too pure. They wore dresses and were loved. They didn't do much of anything and that's what I wanted.

And then I left. All there is to it. A place with a name I like to say MONTANA.
7) We loved to travel. *Sometimes she loved him, like now, like right now.* Was it love or was it just a yearning?

"Just a yearning"—this line she thinks all day.

There was another trip down to New Orleans during their senior year of college. Dave and I had been going out for about a year. We lived in his apartment mostly, but also spent time in my messy studio next door to the Saratoga, an insane asylum.

_The air is getting cooler. When I smoke out on the steps I have to wear a sweatshirt. I stare at the cars and trucks in the lot next door. Over and over I read NISSAN. Then I go NASSIN. Then I go NISSAN. The truck never moves at night. I love Missoula._

I have pictures of that time in New Orleans, the type of pictures I look at and can say, "Don't I look young?" In my suitcase, I brought along a black skirt with white flowers on it. I wore it almost every day. Maybe if I think about that skirt I can bring up something; maybe if I smell it I can remember how I felt exactly.

_Yesterday I wore the skirt because I still could, it's warm enough, but it didn't feel right. I felt old and the skirt is young just like the straw hat I wore all through the streets of New Orleans._

We rode down in a rental car. We had trouble finding our Bed and Breakfast in the newly reconstructed area of New Orleans. Around us were houses that I guess squatters (if that term is still used) lived in. Our room had a slanted floor. When I wasn't wearing the hat, I would lie it on the crooked bed. There was no hot water in our room.
On Saturday night Dave and I went out on a river boat, a dinner cruise sort of thing. What I remember is the carpet, red and plush; and the meat, big bloody pot roasts that really looked disgusting. When our waitress took the cork off our wine, it split and splinters of cork fell into the bottle we were drinking. Dave was dismayed, but we ended up getting another free bottle.

So then when I was tipsy or really rather drunk from two bottles of wine, Dave pulled out a little box and there was a ring with a tiny diamond and a cluster of green stones. Because I was so drunk, I felt confusion. I'm sure that I smoothed my hair and acted phony. I acted coy and said nothing for a second, but "Can we have kids, lots of kids?" That's all I wanted. But I was quick to say in the next breath, no, no, no...By this time we were on the bow of the boat on a bench. I don't remember paying for the meal or maybe it was included or even moving our bodies along the edges of the boat. I should remember what the water looked like as we sat there, but I don't. I'm sure it was magnificent and swirling, but it's not what I wanted.

Dave might have been hurt, but outwardly he didn't seem to care. He told me to keep the ring (and I did until it broke and he got me another one on the Ponte Vecchio in Florence and that had to be cut off by pliers on a camping trip).

We walked through the streets of New Orleans a bit and rode on the cars. We peered in a few bars; we were still too young to drink officially. We went back to the hotel room. I felt in love. In love because here was someone I could say no, no, no to and yet he would not leave.
8) Florence, Italy, many years ago it seems. Summer. Hot. Girl in same hat as New Orleans arrives in July. She is here to study Italian. Boyfriend, David Southward, mauls the Irish moors and comes to see her on the weekends. She stays in a cool pensione near the Boboli gardens. A hurried call and he says he will be in Florence soon. When is soon? Every day she expects him and doesn't go out in the afternoons after her class. Finally this is ridiculous, a watched pot never boils phenomenon, and so she does go the gardens to look at the statues and dried fountains and to lie in the yellow, scratchy grass (it's not that bad because she has a towel.) And then yes, he's there when she comes back as if the holding your breath method works and in this foreign city, nothing is better than to have him there with her. Because it is her birthday, he buys her a plant with a red flower. They stroll up and down the streets, hand in hand. An American girl in Italy: to her this is very Romantic.

9) Dave and I have a history of not leaving and of following. He has followed me to Maine, Mexico, Italy, and Montana. Just when I would think that I had pushed him too far, there he would be, gay or straight, grouchy or euphoric, working hard on a stupid dissertation or simply cruising. He would always arrive. I too would come to him. To Yale, down to South Carolina when I took a long train trip and arrived at three a.m. As the Henry James line goes, "I shall always expect you."

Because we know each other so well, I could tell on my last trip to New Haven that things were going to be different. I was in Maine at the time. I left on the seven o'clock bus from Brunswick, Maine. On the bus,
I felt wary and agitated, but I tried to ignore it. I got to Hartford around one and waited in the train station. After getting conned into buying a homeless man a hot-dog, there was Dave, jogging up to me as usual. His hair looked shorter and I felt the usual unexpectedness of seeing the expected. I was joyful as I usually am when I haven't seen someone for a while, but in his face I could see it. **THE CHANGE.** Finally the change. It was almost a relief, and although we said nothing as we walked towards the car and I had my arm around his waist, our lives had suddenly split. But why? Wasn't I the same Skip he had always loved? Wasn't I the same girl/woman/child he adored? What could my life be without him curling my hair around his hand in bed? And what of me, who could I wail to with childish vigor; who could I tease?

10) I tell Dave I’m writing this piece. We talk on the phone and both sound like we’re about ready to keel over. He says bitterly when I tell him that I’m going to include some of Mark Strands' poetry, "Get back at me by including the poet I hate." I want to say, but you are happy, Dave, and I have never been happy enough for you and Mark Strand is, well, melancholy. He says when I tell him how I’m going to lie in the piece, "Don't Skip, just tell it like it is. People can tell." Can you tell? I can't even tell. If I rewrote this twenty times, each time it would be different, so different that Dave and I would seem like a different people. What does this say for our lives? What is concrete besides the house we lived in, the shirts we wore, and the words that we exchanged, that float somehow on and on in my brain and in the world? But interpretation is always different. Say it is a gloomy day. Then perhaps I will say that I
felt like killing myself in New Haven. But if the day is warm, New Haven will be warm and full of possibility. I can only think of a Mark Strand line: "Your friends/ move past the window, their faces soiled with regret."

We say now that we will live together in the same town, across the street, of course. Because Dave grew up in Florida, we might move there and wouldn't it be fun to live in the state with the prettiest name? I see myself walking among alligators. But this is all imaginary.

11) In Montana, I find myself in another hotel room. This is the story: The man I've been seeing and I are suppose to meet my friend Pam for lunch in Hot Springs, about an hour and a half away from where I live. It is twelve o'clock and we have just woken up from our Halloween night. I still have fake blood on my face and our wigs lie in heaps beside the bed. I feel odd, like the intoxicating night didn't happen, like we didn't walk around Missoula at four in the morning looking for a place to eat.

So now we wake, hungry and depleted, foggy from gin.

Finally by two we have left my apartment. Unfortunately we take a wrong turn, but we keep on driving. It's not exactly screw Pam and her lunch, but something close to it. We keep going. Soon we are near the lake. It starts to snow.

We decide that we must stay in the resort hotel and justify it easily: the roads are wet, we could get killed. When we go inside and learn that there are two prices: $65 for a "city" view and $85 for a lake view, we immediately decide on the lake. We have no clothes with us.
When he asks me what our room number is and I tell him 312, he says, "Oh, my God, not that number." I take this as a sign of his past life and feel a thrill when I open the door.

I love staying in hotel rooms. This one is no exception: a king size bed with a green comforter, a coffee maker right outside the bathroom door, MTV, a view of the lake as promised. For about an hour we are in heaven, checking out the place. After that, the joy fades.

We go down to the hotel bar. We order beer and watch the single other couple there. This is not the season; we are basically alone here. When we order chicken wings, I feel a tinge of guilt (my vegetarianism down the drain, but isn't this what I want?) We have nothing to say to one another.

"You know," he says, "I was lying about the room number. I just thought it would add something."

I sip my drink, astonished; all significance fades.

We drink silently and look out at the green lake.

"Do you feel a weird energy between us?" he finally asks.

"No, not at all," I reply because I don't.

He looks annoyed, as if I haven't viewed it right. "I thought for sure you would agree," he says.

"No, I feel comfortable," I stress, "In fact, I was just going to say how nice it is to feel comfortable."

He grins, but it is a melancholy grin.

After several drinks, we meander back to our room. There is nothing to do but order room service. Football is playing on the TV. He wants to watch it and I just want him to be happy. Our room service
waitress appears. She is young and apologizes for not bringing the pepper.

"Oh, we don't need it!" I say, ashamed to send someone back down to the kitchen and then up to our room.

We open the wine, but do not toast. We don't realize that the green cloths lying on the tray are napkins. Our food is covered with little rounds of plastic, like on an airplane.

I try to remain cheerful. I cut into my salmon. He eats his chicken, but soon shoves it aside. "Tasteless!" he says.

I had just signed the Visa statement, $50 for the meal and didn't appreciate this. Why couldn't he lie?

"Why do you look so glum?" he asks, "You have only felt guilty since we got here." And I realize this is true. For some reason I think of my parents, staying in youth hostels at age 60; it seems ridiculous to splurge like this as a graduate student.

*Is this life? Is this really what I want? Is this how the dangerous people live?* I can only answer no to these questions.

We go to sleep. The bed is huge. He remains curled on his side of the bed. I stare out into the dark room. It's two o'clock and neither one of us are sleeping. He jumps up, his animal legs take him to the table. Naked, he smokes a cigarette and I watch him. This body I love, but why are we here? We haven't touched each other since we came. *No Room with a View, no Unbearable Lightness of Being.* When he comes back to bed, he lies his head on my stomach. The air is too thick with smoke.

"When I was little I used to say my name over and over until I got dizzy," he says.

"What do you mean?" I ask.
"Well, I used to really be able to see who I was."

"What about now?" I ask.

"By now I've tried on too many identities," he says.

"Oh..."

"I mean, don't you ever wonder, who is Sally."

12) I say this over and over: Who is Sally? I have to wonder about her. Is she the gin drinking bridge player or the sympathetic woman who encourages her gay boyfriend? The girl who loves staying in hotel rooms? All these things feel false. There has to be something without books, without movies, without pretension, that is me. There has to be something unique and solely my own. I want to say the girl running through puddles. I want to say the girl who reads to an imaginary class is me, but that person isn't here anymore. There are only scraps of her and I see that the girl who used to spend hours reading and imagining herself has got to let go, and become a woman outside of a dream. Every moment is important from walking down the street to eating an orange. Life is not about becoming, a perpetual state of longing or striving. Rather, it is about being. The only thing I've learned of importance so far is that you must close down the imaginary and open up to the real. It is not necessary to imitate. Who are you really? ***