

# ONE

The hands smell of cigarettes. Eyes red. Errant hairs, tendrils on the pillow. Blue pen marks on the pinky, left. An elbow in repose. Toes curled under down comforter. Grey matter tired, maybe lazy at this not so late hour. Abandoning thoughts of turning the oven on, slipping the last cut of bread inside, butter melting on its white crispy pores. Still no cold water runs in the tap. Night quiet. Tongue caressing teeth and the tobacco taste all inside. No hunger, but rather, a giving up, as if all the tasks laid out are monumentally huge and cannot be undertaken, no matter deadlines, promises or other such nonsense.

Stretching. Nipples hard. Gray cotton shirt riding over the belly. Wrists curled in writer's pose. The pose, too, of fighters for sometimes we are both.

All of the new knowledge slowly wafts by unless it can be caught hold of and respun, jagged edges alchemized into something smoother—or not—in the laboratory.

*Labor* being an important part of *laboratory*.

I write from a fourth floor perch. Avocado green Naugahyde loveseat, an occasional bird staring in the direction of my window from the rooftop next door. South-facing windows. A ceiling fan that gets started up around March, April, and will be in use until October if we're lucky. French press coffee. The musical car horns that parade around, announcing fruits, vegetables, and women's clothing for sale from vans ambling down Kingsley Drive.

That gummy-mouthed feeling takes hold.

It takes hold when I am speaking of something important, deep, the truth that fights to stay inside only I am pushing it out, through my mouth. Scratched vocal chords. Soreness. The speaking through dark clouds. My form becomes dense as wet wool, my words mashed and thickened until they

escape my throat and pop into the air. It all takes on a thickness like suffocation, smoke so thick you must yell to be heard.

My volume never rises. There is never any fire. Just a perpetual sinking not unlike ocean depths that press against the lungs, as every word unfolds and I speak of something unspeakable, until it hits air.

## TWO

*Kept* is such a pleasing word to me, even in its one syllable, it presents such soft tongue and quiet meeting of lips:

The Notebook on Loss::Astrological Assessments  
and Queries::Evidence in Favor of Anarchism::Writing  
Pedagogy::Dreams::Poetry Before Bed::the journal::Responses  
(Take My Pulse)::Notes [On Everything]

## THREE

I read Hemingway, his writing about horseracing and hunger. In between, lots of sensual signposts.

He writes of spring and 'false spring.'

I get off the bus, bookmark in place. The park with the artificial lake. The smell of moss, lighter than the scummy scent of the marina in Olympia, Washington.

Hemingway wrote of fishing, the fishermen, goats, goat milk. Poverty. Sweatshirts as underwear. He writes of these things and I think of S. and I in our best clothes, dining at Musso & Frank on Hollywood Boulevard. The \$100 dinners that set each of us back, stubbornly taken before the winter holidays. And I think of how there is no reason to demand cold running water in my apartment; I pay such low rent. I'm thrilled with my windows, the view of downtown, the proximity of palm treetops. I am fond of the light blue carpets and black and white tiled bathroom, the 60s era refrigerator and the Formica table. I have no fireplace to roast chestnuts or throw mandarin peels. I have impeccable bowls, made by friends.

## FOUR

I learned how to play chess in third grade. The shapes of each piece, the various directions they could make on the board, the divisions between those who could play chess and those who could not fascinated me, so much so that it was a mystery every time I sat down to play.

As I got older, my game became sloppy. At twenty I was sitting in the picture window of a Thai restaurant in Hollywood playing chess with a lover at one a.m., pushing the game along so that we could go home and fuck some more.

Sex as a teenager often felt like chess. I had learned at a young age; it sometimes set me apart from my peers. I could tease an aggressive move from my opponent with the naive-appearing move of a soft, open pawn. I could set up a small window of opportunity where my opponent might try to penetrate then close it up with cold-hearted maneuvering of a rook or bishop. My knight could do a little dance in the corner, lulling my opponent into its careful, plotted steps while I watched my other pieces with fear for their safety. Or I could push each piece to the forefront of a game whose end was my only intention, playing half-consciously and completely open to risk.

As a child, each icon of the chessboard held stories within its design. I loved the way the bishop resembled a stone flame. The queen had hips under her dress. The pawns had names, and their sacrifice was noble. My rooks were heavies, sent in to assign power, do my dirty work, while some maiden lived in each piece's windowless confines, soberly dictating the direction of her castle-in-motion. I enjoyed the feel of each piece in my hand, the texture of wood or marble pieces, an eyeless horse, a bishop with a nub at its top, the tiny pointed crown of a queen and the cross adorning the top of the king.

By fifteen, my body felt newly textured, a container of stories which were written and rewritten daily. I could exude a pawn quality, the opening to pieces of more importance, more weight, but the first to be sacrificed. I could become the fickle knight that pranced in corners, retracing steps, caught in confusions. My body could mow down a conquest like the rook, but with the shy, martyr character of the pawn. I could be the queen, hidden behind a garden of characters, waiting for consummation, or just to be overthrown.