

I knew you, & then I lost you. I've looked for you ever since.

I looked for you on the farm where I sensed you growing up entangled in every vine alive in the smell of the October soil, but I could not grasp you.

You hovered within earshot, just out of sight, yet I felt you in the sunlight filtered through the thin green leaves like a deafening chorus. On some days I could not bear to go out into it, instead following chickens gone wild finding nests of eggs tucked away in unsuspected corners. Life always comes on too fast, like an ostinato ringing from the heart of a dead sparrow. I loved the farm but I had to run away.

I looked for you in the 108 drum beats of the Buddhist New Year, each one atoning for a sin. I looked for you in John Cage's 4 minutes & 33 seconds of silence, too.

I looked for you in religion, poking through dusty books: I Ching & the Secret of the Golden Flower, the secret stories of Gnostic Christianity & the Kabbalah & the Anabaptist fathers, in the Torah with its rules & promises, what it means to be Chosen & rejected, always lost with you in a cloud of unknowing. I looked for you in mystical holiness, from Christina the Astonishing, hiding in the trees, to the unhindered lines of Hildegard van Bingen.

I found eternity sketched out persuasively at times, but every philosophy left a you-shaped hole at its core, with nothing to assuage the clean logic of suicide. I gravitated back to the gospel of Virginia Woolf wandering out into the water with stones in her pockets & naturally found you there.

I looked for you in the mountains & rivers, learning from Zen master Dogen that mountains walk, rivers walk, but always away, never to. Always elsewhere, never this place, & yet nowhere but here, no time but now, no one but you.

I looked for you in drugs & other sundry methods of cancelling the id & (less excitingly) world-dulling anti-depressants, anti-psychotics, anti-everything until there was nothing left to negate. But despite these brief moments of stolen respite in sanded corners & safe spaces where one pill

followed another, you were decidedly not there.

I've looked for you in therapy & found you for a moment, in the hospital, your face before me, your scent, your voice, a different ending for a few minutes suspended in a sterile room that made me more determined to find you, to continue the search. The roller coaster of anxiety & unnerving dreams is my true inheritance. It's the trail of breadcrumbs that you leave & I eagerly follow.

I looked for you in the academy, classes forgotten, books left unread, syllabi hanging beautifully suspended & a well-thumbed card catalog stained with both doubt & solace. I failed most of my courses looking for you, chain smoking in the patios tucked into the books you showed me when I should have been in class; from Andre Breton's Paris to William Blake's New Jerusalem, Rimbaud & Christina Rossetti & her crazy brother.

Those days when just a page of you was enough to sustain me, when I had to get away to somewhere undefined, less constrained by our history. I looked for you in & out of the classrooms, walking through the halls again & again, retracing steps like a life-sized ouija board.

I've never found a place to stop, so I keep turning my life over every few years, when the longing to find you grows too strong again.

In Japan I had an office & an expense account, surrounded by books & papers & projects: "assistant professor" but that title could not hold me. & when all that was cleared out, nothing was left in the office but an unexpected trace of you. The last day I lay flat on the floor in an otherwise empty room, swallowed in your sound. I found you but I had to leave.

I looked for you in bodies of water, the lakes & rivers of SW Missouri & the Sea of Japan, & their sometimes welcoming depths.

I looked for you in Buddhist temples thick with incense, sitting zazen, mouthing along with the chants that ultimately don't spell out your name, simply lost in the delicious curves of the Chinese characters I'd like to wrap up & give you on one of our drunken dates.

I looked for you in Shinto shrines, amid the animist hangers-on in the moss where I found your impression. In purification rituals, where the vestal virgins served sake & the priest intoned with flute & drum, your shape was clear in the intoxicated morning air of the gods.

I looked for you in other women, each one beautiful, but each one not you. I looked for you in sex, in the Song of Solomon & the Kama Sutra, lingering on those barely forbidden vowels of desire.

I looked for you in Pollock's broad alcoholic strokes & Rothko's bold squares, privately breaking down in the Chicago Institute of Art because every canvas intones your name with perfect clarity, ringing in the uselessly tiled rooms (& why can't anyone else hear it?)

I find you in masses of people where you are always near. In a crowded crosswalk in Shinjuku or the flick of a stranger's hair in a peak hour train on the Yamanote Line snaking through Tokyo, you were there.

& of course I hear you in every room eventually. Here, too, now, too: sometimes a tap on my shoulder, sometimes a hint of movement, a rattling in the ceiling, furtive footsteps falling just outside the door.

In my search for you I find a unified theory, one word that can tie it all together, disguised in sharp consonants & speechless wonder, holy diphthongs concealed with a laugh.

I've spent my life pursuing poetry but every verse pales next to your authentic voice, always turning like Orpheus to hear your words more clearly.

We talked about going to NY together, so I went alone looking for you 6 months too late. I looked down from the top of the Rockefeller Center, hoping to see you suspended in the air there or at least feel myself walk out into it.

I looked for you in a tea shop in the old part of Seoul. (I still can't believe you weren't there, & pore over the photos again.)

I know there is only one place to find you, in ways that never lose their tracings, lashed stavings locked up & surely sealed & standing upon stolen verses drunk on horses in Inner Mongolia.

Even driving these Ozarks roads now, every turn makes me want to pass by your house again. The roads remind me of driving to you pick you up or drop you off.

I can't say that I have tried to find you more than others, but I have tried my best, & yet here we are. You are on the other side of the river, throwing stones, calling, always calling, while I stitch together clues & call it a life.

& here tucked in the back of a coffee shop where I write this, I know you are waiting just outside the door, everywhere. Messages from you come in on wires. I look for you at the end of every sentence, phrases turning until I lose the way again.

I look for you because I don't know how to do anything else.