

A ROUGH DRAFT FOR THE LAST OF THE AMERICAN LOVE LETTERS

I'M ALREADY IN LOVE WITH YOU. This is something I need you to understand, right away. Because eventually I'm going to need you to love me back. This isn't to say that I'm a needy person, I'm not. I don't expect the same from you, not initially. I'm simply a creature of compulsive loving, so I feel that it's only fair to you that you know that before you keep reading.

I wish I had a quote in mind to place here, but I don't. One that would, at the same time, be a summation and introduction into what I'm trying to explain to you. But I don't want this to feel like an essay. Maybe that D.F.W. quote where he says that every love story is also a ghost story. This can't be in any way braggy, nor can it be apologetic. Maybe later I'll come back and fix this paragraph.

I have a tendency to document things. This is more of a habit of mine, it's not compulsory, although I have no desire to stop it. The pictures, the camera around my neck, the constant creation of new collages, which I print out at Kinko's when I can't sleep, and then hand cut and paste until I'm too tired to crack my knuckles, my journal, my online journal, my blog, interspersed social media outlets, I even have a book of pie charts.

I work for a feminist website. They can't afford to pay me yet.

They hired me because a friend of mine send them in a story I wrote about an old man who worked at a chair museum, and who's job it was to keep people from sitting in certain chairs. He worried near to the point of devastation that he would lose his job, were the museum to invest in signs. I think they thought it was commentary.

I suppose I consider myself to be an aesthetically stimulated person. This isn't to say that I'm superficial, not all the time. I am not beautiful, anyway.

When you do see me for the first time, please don't think of me as something I'm not. I am not a haircut, although I know how short it is, and that it isn't everyone's thing. I don't think it's my thing, not really. The kind of haircut all the bra-burners get right as they're accepted

into their graduate programs. When they shrug off old friendships and relationships, and start on their quarter-life journey mostly involving working as a tour guide for their art institute. Short, undignified, unobjectifying, haircut, combed meticulously with all manner of assumption, intuition, and magnanimity. A haircut that seems to say, "please don't judge me first as a lesbian, but as a human being." I promise to you, I am not a lesbian.

I disregard the word 'slut.' My hope is that the deprivation of the word's meaning is one of the few unearthed spoils of the sexual revolution I don't believe really ever came. I have been with eleven men in my life—vaginally. I don't think that it, as a number, is worthy of conversation, it's just one of those things you share. And like I said, I am not beautiful. Does that make me seem somehow grateful? Because that isn't it.

I'm worried that I might already be becoming dependant on your support and your guidance. I know the way that sounds, but I want us to be honest with one another. I can't hold things in. I explode.

Okay.

So if we've decided to be honest with one another, then there is something much more important that I must tell you before we can go on. It can be a bit hard to take, so I'll try to explain it with as much detail as possible.

I'm sick. And it's very new, something that has just developed over the last year or so. There are a team of doctors trying to figure out exactly what is happening to me, but what they do know is that it's cyclical. It's probably in my brain, something to do with my hormone center—this is all speculation—so there's bound to be some form of stigma attached to it. My mother had it, only not as bad as me, then came menopause, and poof.

It isn't terminal. Not in that sense. Not permanently terminal.

Let me explain. And try to understand that I am not unaware of how ridiculous this may all sound.

For one full week out of the month, I die, and an imposturous version of myself carries on with my daily life. Nobody knows but me. Me and the doctors, and

mother. But rest assured that for these seven days out of the month, I am completely, and medically dead.

At first, they thought that it was some heretofore unfound complication of my menstrual cycle. They theorized that it was a psychosomatic, hormonally caused imbalance, affecting, and essentially replacing my conscious thought. So I spent an entire month at a clinic that specializes in things such as that. When the time came, they hooked me up with breathing tubes, and heart monitors, and blood-pressure gauges, they pumped chemicals into me to keep my heart rate steady, and to maintain my core temperature, and still, just as sudden and unexpected as it had ever come, I died.

There was some mild panic when all the machines went haywire, while simultaneously the impostor me pulled out the IVs and the breathing tubes, yanked off the snap-on monitors and sat up in the bed. A nice doctor checked my pulse, and then promptly went as white as I was. They asked a series of questions, and the imposter me gave them all the right answers. They asked the imposter me to stay at the clinic through the week, so that they might perform tests, and she did. They brought her photographs of the people in my life, and they brought her my notebook computer so that she could peruse the internet.

After the third day, they gave up and released her. So she went to work.

Nobody at the office seemed to notice. The imposter me sat down at the long conference table, which was where the website conducted its morning meetings and decided what the topics would be for the week's articles. She brought everyone bagels. She engaged them in conversation, which I had never even thought to do before. She proposed to the group that the idea of the post-feminist in the modern world was in itself a misogynistic ideology, and that the average adult woman was now in a constant state of self-contradiction because of this. She argued that by continuing to recognize the so-called stigma of enigmatic socialized male dominance, we were, as a sex, perpetuating its own continuation. That we, while seemingly grinding away at achieving a sense of cognitive equality, we were, by our own hands creating a more destructive force than there might be were we to simply stop.

She got me a dual assignment to write on the ascension of female-friendly pornography into the open market, and on the top ten techniques for giving a blowjob.

While all this is happening, I am somewhere deep beneath the earth, unable to move, or breath, or shout, hearing everything through the soft-sounding muffle of the soil. I can smell myself rotting. It is incredibly unpleasant. There is a sort of numbness buzzing throughout my body, but I can also feel things, living things, slithering, and squirming, and crawling with hundreds of sharp, tiny legs throughout my insides. Every once and a while, something will chew a hole through my small intestine, or slide thickly out my nose, or ear canal and the numbness seems to break. I almost start to welcome it. My body tightens as if I were being forced to flex all of my muscles simultaneously, and with the strength of ten of me. I become ridged, and taut.

And the week goes on, while the imposter me goes about my days as if they were hers. She cleans me, and brushed my teeth and hair. She goes out and sees some of my friends, taking pictures, always documenting. She drives my car, always remembering to stop and get gas. She comes home and feeds my body, and she makes collages for me, so that I can see what I've missed. It's far too dark for me to see, not down there, not way down there where all the stillness of the world goes to settle.

I need to tell you now how much I love you for all of this. For your understanding. How much it means to me that you have immersed yourself in what others might see as a burden. For loving me back in the face of otherwise scientific improbability. I adore the way in which you are able to look past my possibly crippling situation and see the much larger picture at work. Already I feel myself hopelessly devoted to you. Are you still reading?

When it's over, and I come back into myself, I spend days showering. I scour my body with water so hot it's nearly boiling, so that my skin tingles, and burns with precious nerves. I can never seem to get the smell out. I void repeatedly, and force myself to be sick all over the floor-mat of my shower. Then the water goes cold and I look through the collages that have been left for me, while I wait for the boiler in the basement to heat the water back up. I read over and over what she's written for the website. I proofread, and make small notations, which I

leave for her. I check up on my social media outlets, and on my online journal. I search the internet history to see which websites she has left comments on. I sometimes take them down, but mostly I leave them there.

I can't make promises for her. That's something you'll have to accept because I barely know her. I don't know that she is capable of loving you, but I will. And I won't mind when you fall in love with her. It seems like everyone does. And we can make lives for each other, the unfortunate three of us.

So choose.