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**ELINOR ABBOTT**

**IS THIS THE MOST ROMANTIC MOMENT OF MY LIFE?**



# Is This the Most Romantic Moment of My Life?

*Thoughts at the End of a Marriage*

by Elinor Abbott

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The Unique Snowflake Of Our Sadness.....5  
Honeymoon.....8  
Gwyneth Paltrow Is A Woman Who Has Everything.....9  
Palmistry.....11  
Romantic Origins.....13  
What to Do With My Dead Body.....15  
The Marriage Bed.....16  
The Way Out.....18  
I Dream Of Packing Boxes.....20  
We Are Built To Forget.....21  
I Dream Of My Husband And His Drummer.....24  
Chicken Little.....25  
Dear Girl Who Came Into Work With A Black Eye The Other  
Night.....28  
How To Sell Your Engagement Ring In 13 Steps.....30  
Happy Snowman.....33  
God is Love.....35

*It's a brand new day and I'm sorry.*  
—Poliça, “Form”

## The Unique Snowflake of Our Sadness

We all start out ignorant of romantic love, even though this truth is never discussed. I was watching *Gossip Girl* once, and one character, the stupid one, had a threesome with his best girlfriend and his regular girlfriend. He was widely chided by all the other characters for not knowing that “in a threesome, the third person should always be a stranger.” I was like, “They should?” I was ten years older than everyone on the show, and I felt like I should be taking notes. Fictional teens knew so much more than me.



As far as love goes, we have whatever our families gave us, which is so vast and confusing and archetypal that we will spend the rest of our lives wondering, “Is this why I am myself?” Then we have movies, we have TV, we have the first few experiences of our salad days. And voilà, you have now washed up on the shores of adulthood, and are meant to go around humping things until you find your life mate.

I remember being so desperate for my first kiss, convinced I was the last human on earth to receive one, that I made up a story about kissing a guy I met at a Shakespeare festival. I told everyone he had a tongue ring. I thought giving the story an unusual detail would make it more plausible.



When I met my husband I hadn't given ten seconds of thought to what love meant to me. I only knew what it was supposed to be like. That doesn't mean my love wasn't real or true. I believe it was, only that my ignorance was total. I learned by doing.



I loved my husband like I had fallen off a cliff. Like I found a shotgun and accidentally blew my face off. I had the insane optimism of

someone making toast in the bath. I was so in love with him that I failed my bartending school test because I just couldn't think about anything else. I shouldn't have been allowed to drive a car.

He was just as stupid as me, in case you are wondering. We would both be the stupid one on *Gossip Girl* who didn't know the rules of a threesome. In fact, I believe, if life were *Gossip Girl*, we would all, all of humanity, be playing the stupid one. We are all Dan Humphrey; we are none of us Chuck Bass.



Is it a tragedy that my marriage didn't work? I don't know. Sometimes I feel like I love my husband more now than I ever did because he is far away and we cannot hurt each other anymore. Sometimes I start crying about him while I'm brushing my teeth or eating something, and I don't know why.



I used to say to people: "In the movies marriage is the end of the film, but in reality, it's just the beginning." I used to say, "You're not allowed to talk about your life with your boyfriend once you marry him. A veil gets drawn. Everything becomes private. You're alone in there."

My friend once said to me while she was still single, "I told my other single friends that it's great to be around you because you don't act like a married person." I asked her what she meant by that and she said, "I don't know, you just don't seem married." I never knew if this was good or bad. I never knew what this portended.

I do know that when I got divorced I had to let go of things I didn't even know had happened to me until I saw them slip over my head and fall to the floor. I was molting.



Think about this: All around you today wherever you are, people are divorced, people have lost people they love, people have seen their parents die, they have seen a dead child, they have been the victims of trauma, they are barely holding it together, and they are all walking around pretending to be fine.

I am not fine. Divorce, the dismantling of a life I spent ten years trying to build and saying goodbye to it forever, has been the most insane thing that's ever happened to me. I think it would actually be crazier to go through something like this and be "fine" at the end. It would make me less of a human being and more of a lawn that just needed to be mown. Are you fine? Are you just a lawn that needs to be mown?



If you could just sit here with me, that would be best. That would be all I want. Just a moment where I turn to you and I say, "I never knew anything." and you nod and you say, "I never knew either, I was always pretending." Not that our pain is the same, but that our ignorance maybe came from the same place, and that here we are, looking at the unique snowflake of our sadness saying that we never knew, that no one else can really know, that we are learning by doing and that it's razor blades, every step, all the way to the top floor.

## Honeymoon

One time in Mexico I had to take my swimsuit off in the water to fix something, and my husband stared at me in horror. I was neck deep in water. “Someone will see you,” he said. I said, “No they won’t.” A wave lifted me up a little, pushed my breasts, bobbing, to the surface, like waxing moons. I laughed. He did not. “Put your swim suit on!” he insisted. “I’m trying!”, his embarrassment was embarrassing me, making my hands stupid. The truth was it felt nice there, naked in the water. It felt like I could slip under and swim away, dumb and happy and forever nude, a pale seal. It felt like I could walk out from the sea like Venus on a clamshell and lay there on the white beach without shame. But shame was shoved in my face like a grapefruit half. I succumbed to its acidity. Eventually I got the clasp done right and we swam back to the boat together like Adam and Eve with grape leaves, cowering before God, naked no longer, penitent of their sex. Even though God made sex and shouldn’t have been surprised by it. What use is a God like that? Who makes a thing only to ask that it be hidden from view?

# Gwyneth Paltrow Is A Woman Who Has Everything

My husband and I sat down and continued to fill out our divorce papers, which I had been avoiding for a week, because we were at the money/debt part and there isn't a human on earth who wants to talk about that shit. Not even in the nicest, happiest parts of a relationship do you ever want to talk about that.

Then I wandered into the living room and read an article about how Gwyneth Paltrow is a woman who “has everything”. And yes, she's really happy with her life, even though some people think she has had it all smooth sailing, but boy are they wrong! She did have a few hard years there. Go Gwyneth! You made it!



I looked at the New York City Craigslist housing rentals and laughed.

I locked myself in the bathroom for a while.

When I came out of the bathroom, I picked a fight with my husband. I sat on the floor and cried. I told him that I maybe want to keep the brand new mattress we bought right before we decided not to be married anymore, and maybe some of the knives, even though knives are his thing. Eventually we said we loved each other, and told each other all of our best wishes for the other, and I was pushing tears off my face and thinking “I could never ever wish this on anyone.” I tried to think of one person I hate enough to wish this divorce shit upon them, and not a one came to mind.



I ate one handful of jelly babies and another of those bright orange cheese crackers for lunch.

I kept thinking about what kind of writer I want to be, and why can't I just be the one that I am? What does that even mean? I kept thinking I've been wearing yoga pants too long, for too many days in a row to ever be good enough for anything.

The clean laundry stayed where it's been for the last forty eight hours, in a pile on top of the laundry basket.

Yesterday I fell asleep on the couch before I could do anything I intended to do that day, and then just went to bed without brushing my teeth.

## Palmistry

When I was a child my most common reoccurring dream was that all the skin peeled off the palms of my hands. It was so weird. And as an adult all the skin did peel off my hands, over and over, until I now have skin so fragile it's like onion skin. I'm so ready to bleed that that if I put my nose in my hands I can smell the blood. Is it sexy to smell like blood? Who wants that? Wild animals? Vampires? The woman who used to do my nails said she couldn't anymore, "too much blood," she said.

Now I cut my nails myself. They're never even. My left hand isn't strong enough. I wonder if I did this to my skin with my brain, if I'm learning something, and I'm so fucking stupid I just have to learn it over and over. If my body has to bleed for me to notice it, so I say, what is wrong with you my darling and lean over it like a protective lover and hold it tenderly.



If anyone wanted to ask my advice on how to get out of your marriage, I'd tell them to be their own lover. I'd tell them to put their own skin in their mouths, I'd tell them to touch their face like they'd never seen it before, like it was a holy miracle, I'd tell them to write themselves their own erotic poetry. I'd tell them to do it quick, before they started to smell like blood. Because after you smell like blood the only thing left for you to smell like is carrion.



I worked as a waitress at this Asian fusion place a long time ago. My boss was named Said, and he had one lazy or weird eye, I don't know what was wrong with it. He was this big hulking man, and I always thought he was going to rape me. I'd never seen anyone with an eye like that, but for some reason, once I started working there people with one weird eye would come in all the time. They were constant. I started to feel like it was some common affliction I'd never noted

before, but after I quit I stopped seeing it.



When I was sixteen a random woman approached me in a coffee shop and asked to read my palm. My left palm is particularly strange because it has a straight line running deeply across it, just at the fold of the palm. She told me this was because I was only going to love one man for my whole life. Sometimes that thought would help me on dark nights, when I didn't think I could be anyone's wife anymore. But now it seems like bullshit. Love is quicksand. You move and you sink, you move and you're swallowed, you move and you escape. But it's never stationary. It's never one clear line of forever like a fucking cupid's arrow shot into the future. I looked at that line the other night and thought, "Maybe she meant Nick," who is my oldest male friend, and I laughed. I think the space between magic and bullshit is the space of a sigh. And even if it is all bullshit, I am going to pick magic anyway. I want to pick magic anyway. I pick magic anyway.

## Romantic Origins

My first boyfriend broke up with me over the phone a week before prom. I had been in a hot tub at a party when a sympathetic partygoer informed me that my boyfriend did not consider me his girlfriend. I was devastated. Humiliated. What could possibly be worse than going around for six months espousing that I was the girlfriend of a guy who thought of me as nothing more than something he did after band practice in the back of his Toyota? How could I be so stupid?



He dated someone on the outskirts of my friend group the year before. She slept with him, and then he dumped her. We all pitied her. I would not be so duped. I had held fast to the tiara of my virginity, convinced that I would spare myself her fate by keeping my cherry dangling before him.

Crying on the phone with him, I realized I had been extra duped by thinking virginity granted me control. We were official only in my imagination. We never walked through the halls holding hands. We met up only under the cloak of darkness, in someone's empty house and rolled around for a while.

I realized in those six months we'd been "together" I had never even seen the inside of his bedroom, or looked at any of his art. What I had done was obligingly lean over him while he lay on the floor, let him stick his head up my shirt and unhook my bra. I remember thinking in those moments, "this must be what a cow feels like." But I still wanted him to want me.

I agonized over it. Despite all my efforts, I was still cast as the stupid slut rather than the romantic lead. I glanced longingly at the turn to his house when we passed it. I would have taken him back in a moments notice. Had I pursued him too eagerly? Did he despise me in my eagerness?



Shortly thereafter, I fished a zine out of some diner windowsill about a guy who was hotly sought by a girl he didn't care much for. The final line of the zine was something like: "Even blow jobs can be bad if given by someone you hate." I took this like a bullet to the heart. I knew this was going to be my fate. Crawling around on my hands and knees, unknowingly giving blowjobs to men who hated me.

I was, I believed, and always would be, too dumb about men to know any better. My father moved across my life like a storm sytem. I knew nothing of male constancy. I had no true north.

## What To Do With My Dead Body

I implicitly trusted my husband to do the right thing with my dead body. What a comfort. I hadn't even known it at the time.



I called my sister and said, "I'm just calling to check to see how many days it would take for you not to hear from me before you started worrying that I was dead. Do you think I'll end up a legless woman in a chair that they'll have to lower the bus ramp for?" Then I called my mom but she wasn't home. I just wanted to hear from someone who would care if I died. I fear dying alone in my apartment and no one finding me for a long time. I texted my sister, "Hey can we talk soon about how you're my new emergency contact now? Also, I want to talk about what I want done if I unexpectedly die because nobody knows what to do with my dead body now."



I can't stop thinking about this PostSecret controversy where someone sent in their secret and it said, "She dumped me but I dumped her (body)" and then there was a map of a nature reserve with an arrow pointing to a particular spot. I kept thinking of that woman's body. I kept thinking of all the women's bodies dumped somewhere.



I cried on the bus today. I'm like this all the time; haphazard, veering, jolting around and I am sometimes just amazed that people live like this and have always lived like this. And I have no idea how I am going to live like this. Where I have to care the most about myself. I just have to do it. I just have to propel myself along.

If your marriage were a fairy tale what would it be? Mine would be Rapunzel.

## The Marriage Bed

My husband sleeps on the living room couch and I sleep in the beautiful mutilated sleigh bed that's been in my family for three generations. My parents first gave it to me when I was six, and slept in an entirely pink bedroom. They gave it to me again, refinished, the gigantic, seismic crack in the headboard restored, as a wedding present.



A few weeks before I got married, my mom, dad, and sister came down, and we all, like some kind of Amish pre-marital ritual, assembled the various pieces of the sleigh bed in me and my husband's apartment.

There was a person standing at each end of the bed, holding it in place, but somehow the headboard fell and cracked open again. My parents just turned and silently left the apartment, leaving my husband and I standing above the rebroken bed my parents just paid who-knows-how-much to fix.

We've hauled it around with its crack ever since. I told this to my friend John and I said, "We should have taken it as an omen." He said, "My family isn't smart enough to interpret things as omens," and I thought how you don't need smarts to interpret omens, you need honesty. You need to be able to crack the door open to your chest and let the icy, cold universe in. My husband and I had more smarts than you could wave a stick at, but honesty came later.



I told my husband that I keep waking up at 4am filled with existential terror, and he said that he is doing that too. I keep waking up thinking that I am dying and that I should call out for my husband, but wait, don't call out, because he is going, going, gone.

I'm going to have to call out for something else, for someone else, but there isn't anything. There's just me with my throat full of darkness. It's just me. It is so lonely that I begin to understand how people could just say, "I love you so much that I will be unhappy with you forever." Oh husband. I loved you so much. I loved you with the biggest, weirdest love that I could've ever created.



Today my husband said to me, "I know it's been the cause of some of our most major problems, but all I've ever wanted to do is take care of you." And I looked at him in his workout shorts, standing by the chaise lounge, and I knew he meant it. You always go into love thinking you can do the thing you are not remotely equipped to do. You think, I can totally handle this. I've got this. I could feel his sentiment so sincerely that I thought, "Is this the most romantic moment of my life?"

## The Way Out

I have a wet, rattling cough and I keep thinking, “Consumption, here it is.” I’ve read so many Victorian novels with so many Victorian heroines that now I am actually going to die like one. I’ve contracted a disease through poetic osmosis. My broken heart and my broken immune system are working in cahoots to kill me.



I remember this girl I used to be friends with sat down with me over paella once and we talked about being crazy. She said she would sometimes cry so hard she thought she would die of crying. When I was in Arizona in January, after my husband and I decided to separate, I saw my horrible face in a gchat video screen and I shut the computer and lay on the bed and cried the loudest I have since childhood. I was in the guesthouse and no one could hear me.

It was such a blessing, the knowledge that no one could hear me. Like I was in space. And Arizona is so quiet that there is no one even listening for you. Everyone is old and asleep. How can one person cry so much? My dad cries constantly. Please God, save my dad. A few weeks ago I screamed “Fuck you” at my husband and it came from the same place inside of me as that sob in Arizona did.

I felt like I had let go of one more thing. How much more until I’m empty?



Everything that happens to everyone just turns into memories. Isn’t that the saddest thing you’ve ever heard?



I am looking on Craigslist for where I am going to live now that I have created a family and disassembled a family. Which sitcom

style hilariously unfathomable situation am I going to put myself in? Am I going to live with two male lawyers in a loft downtown where one of them sleeps on the couch?

You'd be amazed how many people renting cheap rooms want you to email a 'detailed description' of yourself before showing you the place. Which cheap room is my cheap room? What kind of person am I going to be now that I am untethering myself from everything I ever knew?



All I know is that I need love worse than anyone I have ever met in my life. I need it so much that I have spent all my life assembling a super highway of escape from it. I need it so much that I don't even fucking understand it in my own body. I need it so much I have done the worst things ever to myself so that I can control anyone who comes near me. Inside I feel like a place I've arrived at the wrong time, like when you're in other countries and you don't know when people go out so you go out at eight thirty and there's no one and inside the club there is just techno music and one bored bartender and you're sweating gin and tonic. I want a stamp on my hand. Validation. And it's never going to stop. It's never ever going to stop. I used to tell myself all the time when I felt this way that I just had to write my way out, write your way out, write your way out, and so. Here I am.

## I Dream Of Packing Boxes

Last night I dreamt that I was hurriedly packing boxes in my old kitchen, as if a timer were about to run out or I was under a horribly crushing deadline, jamming things in, taping things shut, fast, like a factory worker, when my ex husband came in through the front door. Seeing him cracked me like an egg. His eyes were dark like bruises in his head, almost purple, like he was starving to death or had survived a terrible mauling. “Oh no,” I said to him, “No, I can’t see you. Please go away. It hurts too much.” And he nodded and smiled and came over to me with a shopping bag, “I know,” he said. “It’s only for a little while longer.” He held up a shopping bag and brought out the entire series of Seinfeld on DVD. He gave me three of the boxes, “I want you to have seasons one through three. They’re the funniest ones. They’re going to help you when things get hard.” He is still smiling. He is looking into my eyes kindly and thoughtfully and sadly and I thought, I am never going be able to leave him. And I got that feeling in my chest like I do, as though I am pinning a butterfly in place, as though I am crushing the larynx of some little thing that is both trying to be free and trying to love and forgive someone forever and ever and ever. That is trying to make love into an incurable condition that you will always have, fixed forever inside you, like an absent kidney.

## We Are Built To Forget

I had a cat, well, two cats, with my ex husband. My joke is that he got Witch Baby, our ten year old cat, and I got Wayne, our cat who died five years ago, and whose ashes are inside a Tupperware container in my closet. There was no contest about who Witch Baby was going to go live with. She clearly preferred my ex to me. So I have an ex husband and an ex cat. We were all together for ten years and now we'll never see each other again.

I didn't miss her much at first, but I gradually began to. Her cannonball weight in the bed. Finding her grumpy little face peering up at me from some unexpected place where I had caught her napping. Watching her in a window happily sunning her tummy.

But then yesterday I saw a cat gif compilation somewhere and one of the cats was doing a weird thing, like making bread with its back paws and I suddenly remembered that Witch Baby would make bread with all four paws. Witch Baby making bread with all four paws had been such an omnipresent weirdness in my life that I felt startled I had forgotten all about it. We'd even had a name for this behavior; we called it 'four paw.' My ex husband and I would crack each other up doing imitations of it.

And I dropped the memory like it was nothing. I didn't even know I had done it.



For many years I was really fixated on a couple of people my husband had been in a band with. We had been friends and there had been a large falling out between us, initiated primarily by me, and then later on his band broke up and I kind of got saddled with ye auld 'Yoko Ono' mantle. And while this is lame finger pointing on a number of levels, I really took it to heart. I really thought that I had somehow shouldered all the responsibility of all the actions of all those people, and if I had been able to rewind time and choose a

different reaction to these two former friends of mine, I could save this band. I could deliver this different choice to my husband and take all his unhappiness away. Everything would be ok. If only I could change it. Fix it. Go back. Every time I ran into these two people I was awash with pain, the terrible feeling that I had ruined everything, and so I engaged them in huge conversations where I apologized profusely. I wrote them overly sincere letters. I refused to forget.



It wasn't until much later that I realized my obsession with trying to repair these broken friendships, and taking on all the blame for the breaking up of this band, had more to do with the fact that I was in a very unhappy marriage than these actual friendships. I was trying to take that huge gigantic problem, and make it something manageable. I held onto this broken situation with these two people like a key I could force into the lock of a door.



It's weird to think that those years of obsessing over that situation granted me absolutely nothing. Yielded not one moment of peace. No extra happiness. Did nothing to help my husband. My refusal to let it go, to forget it, to drop it, never returned anything to me but more misery.



Ultimately, I think we are built to forget. It made me very sad to have a flash of realization that I was forgetting my cat, my weird, funny cat who I loved for so long. Just like when I was about to leave my husband, I dug through his pockets for spare laundry change and then sat on the floor and held his jeans to my body, weeping. These little things were slipping away, and I knew I had no choice but to let it slide away from me, to let it sink under the ice and out of sight.

What other option is there, really? I had tried these other routes in the past and knew they were dead ends. I could have kept the jeans, but the man I loved is gone. I could write down everything I remember about Witch Baby but it wouldn't recreate her. She's disappearing. They are disappearing. It's death. It's loss. It's grief. And the only way out, like everything, is through.



We live in a culture that allows us to hold on to things endlessly and creates normalcy around it. On Facebook you never have to leave high school. You can keep it all, every person, every heartbreak, every loss, close as possible. But when you are filled up with what happened to you before, you are ignoring what is happening to you now. When you choose not to lose the past, you lose the present.

That, to me, is the worst pain. Not the pain of forgetting, but the pain of pinning yourself in place, saying "That is me. That is my mistake," and trying to dissect it. Take all the parts out. Put different things inside. It's all just cellophane. It's all memory. You're wading in dream space, insistent that you never wake up.

That's what forgetting is for.

## **I Dream Of My Husband And His Drummer**

I had a dream that I walked into a room where my husband and the drummer of his old band are sitting on either end of a purple gymnastic pommel horse. The room is at the top of a nightclub and the room is also purple. Neither one of them are paying any attention to the nightclub, or to me, they are ensconced in discussion. My ex cat walks over to me and rolls over and shows me her tummy. I can see that she no longer is licking all the hair off her belly, and the hair has grown in purple. I am happy to see her, happy she is better, and I scratch her, impressed with her health. I say to her, "I guess the problem was you were allergic to me for all those years." Then my husband notices me. He looks over at me and he says, "The reason we got divorced is because you are a bad person." I look up at him on the pommel horse and I say, "No, the reason we got divorced is because you are not as kind as either of us believed you were."

## Chicken Little

I've been more obsessed with death than anything else in my life. I mean, it's probably pretty normal since death is something we're all going to experience one day. When I was a kid, like four or five, it was Halloween time at my kindergarten and we were doing all these decorations with skeletons. In music we were singing songs about skeletons, and I became incredibly disturbed by it. I became afraid to take baths at night. I was afraid of my body. I was afraid that if I took off my clothes, my body wouldn't be under it, only a skeleton.



Once I was encouraged by a friend to go see a Vedic astrologer. What I usually tell people is how expensive it was, and how her computer wasn't working so she was reading two different charts off two different screens, and how she told me I was meant to be a surgeon and how learning disabilities (which I have) don't really exist. How all other forms of astrology but Vedic are bullshit.

What I leave out is the actual reason I decided to go see this astrologer in the first place. I was looking for some kind of edict from the universe that my husband and I would always be together, and that he wouldn't die before me.

I broke down in tears in her office and basically begged her to tell me that this would be true. I'll never forget the look she gave me.



I remember telling our couples therapist during a private session that I was so consumed by the idea of my husband's death that I was having constant panic attacks about it. "It isn't even that I'm afraid he'll die soon," I told her. "It's just that one day he will die. No matter what." I was so afraid to be alone that sometimes I would make my husband sit in the bathroom with me while I took a shower.

I consumed every single moment of my day with activity, running, social media, movies, talking endlessly on the phone to anyone. I didn't want to be with my brain for one unguarded moment, lest thoughts of death swoop in. I lived my life like Chicken Little. The sky was always falling.



During this time my grandmother died, my friend Ben died, and my cat Wayne died. My fear of death made me so cowardly that I never went to visit my grandmother at the hospital during the final days of her life. When we put Wayne to sleep and watched him die, watched the big blackness swarm his eyes, my husband came to me later and said, "Promise me you'll never die." and I said, "Ok."

I would lay in bed sometimes in the panic ridden darkness, trying to swallow and think, "Maybe I won't die, maybe none of us will, maybe it just won't happen," and something inside me felt off kilter at this thought, like you do when you accidentally put on a pair of pants backwards.

We were made for death and my whole body knew it. Trying not to die would be like trying not to be born.



My mom was in town last week, and I would occasionally look over at her and think, "I am so happy you're here. I am so happy that you and I are right here." Not that I wished she would live forever, though I do, or that I could freeze our love for each other, though that would be great, but that this moment with her was transitory. That the deepest, most primal of love is a fucking flash in the pan. But at least when you know that, you can open your eyes and watch with awe as it flares bright and disappears.



I just had my first wedding anniversary on my own yesterday. I made a life with someone and now it's over and it's never coming back. And I will never be that person again and I will never be with my ex husband again.

He's gone. I'm gone too. All of our language is gone. Our jokes. Our love of animals. Our favorite films. Our songs. Our weird silent communication from so many hours together.

I see things that remind me of him every day and they're so natural to me that they begin to bloom into words and stories, but then I remember there is no one on the other end anymore. The phone lines have been cut. There is just me, holding the disconnected receiver to my ear, listening to my own voice bounce back. And so I try to cry if I need to or I stand there and feel puzzled for a second if I need to or I think, "Oh! That's right!" as if my entire life were a weird surprise birthday cake I was baked into and just popped out of.

## Dear Girl Who Came Into Work With A Black Eye The Other Night,

Do you want to marry me? I am in the final stages of a divorce, but I think we could be happy together. We can take my ex-husband's car because he hardly uses it and I don't think he'd press charges, claiming he wants me to be happy after all, and we will go to the Pacific coast. You will fit right in with your dreads and your dirty gutter punk dress. I don't know where I fit, but I know that all my clothes come off and that we can swim naked in the ocean together. I know that I am a good swimmer. I know that I could live naked and shameless in a beach shack with you, each of us taking an occasional cigarettes from a pack of American spirits on the kitchen table, going outside to smoke them under the storm heavy clouds, smelling the sea in between puffs of smoke, burning our fingers on Strike Anywhere matches, your feet hardened from years of walking along highways with your thumb out, my feet, my body, infinitely tender and bruisable, like peach flesh, you could pierce me with a sharp fingernail and watch my blood bloom and bleed and spill, and even though this doesn't make sense, your hardness, my softness, against our differences in age, we are happy anyway. What does happiness mean to you? I don't know what it means to me. Maybe it means swimming in the ocean. Maybe it means the ocean itself, the expanse of it, looking at it and feeling the vastness wash through my brain, the terror of infinity. But it is only a tiny thing, really, in the great scheme of things, which makes you and I hardly more than specks of dust, my sandy haired, fist-bruised love. Know that I will never hurt you. Know that I will trace your collar bones with my fingers and put your ribs in my hands and ask you if you were born small or made small. Know that I will remember your black eye when it's long faded away, know that I will ask how you made money, what you did for money and take the answer and store it in a treasure chest in my heart, know that I will shave my head and put the curls in a jewel box if that will make you happy, know, again, that I will never hurt you, know that I will protect you, sweet, beautiful girl, and that if you want we never, ever have to talk about it. We never have to talk about anything, just be quiet together. Because baby girl,

oh little black-eyed pixie with your dirty heels and dirty nails and  
dirty heart, I know I know I know I know. I already know; the  
hardness inside you.

# How To Sell Your Engagement Ring In 13 Steps

**Step 1.** Agree with yourself previously that this will be the saddest thing you've ever done. Even though you never wore your engagement ring because it always made you very uncomfortable and it's been sitting in a fireproof box in your closet for four years.

**Step 2.** Look at it. Remember how weird and archaic it felt to be given a jewel to wear to distinguish you from non-married females. Remember the time in Blockbuster when you were running your hand along the movies, not reading the titles but watching the changing color of the stone in the light.

**Step 3.** Take some pictures of yourself with the ring. In case you want to remember you had it one day? Proof of some sort? You look and feel as weirdly detached from it as you always have, as if you are two things from two separate worlds never meant to be put together.

**Step 4.** Read a fucking ton of Warsan Shire poetry.

**Step 5.** Talk to an Irish guy named Bobby who owns a pawnshop near your apartment. He tells you to bring the ring in but not to expect much. You tell him not to worry.

**Step 6.** Get dressed. Going through your clothes, think "Where are those pants with the hole in them?" wear those pants.

**Step 7.** Walk to the pawnshop listening to Lana Del Rey's Paradise.

**Step 8.** Go through a part of town where the women normally cover their entire bodies for religious reasons. Get briefly hassled by a man on the street. Zip up your hoodie to your chin.

**Step 9.** Bobby thinks you could get a better deal elsewhere. "I got a pile of sapphires in the back you wouldn't believe," says Bobby, "what am I going to do with these things?" You nod sympathetically,

as you only have one sapphire to unload and it feels like a lead weight. Another guy at the jewelry counter looks at the ring and says, “I’m getting a divorce too.” You reply, “There must be something in the water.” It’s the most meaningless statement you could possibly make. but you and this man both laugh, happy to share this terrible thing with some other human.

**Step 10.** Walk home. It rains. Your Toms get soaked through. Have a cigarette.

**Step 11.** Go to three other pawnshops, each packed with old engagement rings inside jewelry cases like a shiny graveyard. You’ve never been to pawn shops before. You grew up inside a rotating variety of BMWs and Lexus. There is still so much you don’t know about the world, and you are slowly finding it out by fumbling through life’s Halloween funhouse; closing your eyes, sticking your hands into bowls and jars, guessing what’s inside. You decide pawnshops are the most depressing places on earth. They look and feel like a theatrical venue for dream death. Watch a high school kid pawn his trumpet. Ponder his reasons.

**Step 12.** Take the highest offer, which is practically nothing. Watch someone at Pawn America zip your ring up in a plastic bag and throw the box away. You’re trying to be cucumber cool but you’re shaking slightly as you turn to leave, you feel as if you’ve gone pale, like a woman in Victorian times. You didn’t know it would feel this way, that your pain would be a drop in the fucking bucket. Ordinary. Another glistening headstone in the graveyard. You live in an ocean of horrible things among which you are hardly noticeable.

**Step 13.** Use some of the money to go see *The Great Gatsby*. Have a dream later that you’re having a threesome with Gatsby and Daisy. After you’ve been fucked, Gatsby/Leo comes after you with a syringe of carrot juice saying he’s going to inject it into your womb so you have mutated babies. On the bedside table you discover a syringe of your own, with a weird orange liquid inside, and begin to threaten Leo with it. You’re in a stalemate, each with a syringe, each

with a syringe, each not wanting to be injected. You, the you observing the dream you, wonder how this dream got so twisted.

## Happy Snowman

I told my husband once that he would have made an amazing shaman, or possibly cult leader, and this is why he feels so lost in his life. He could live in a room without a bed and eat a crust of bread a day, deprive himself of everything. He could make as big a deal of it as he wanted to, and astound everyone.

Sometimes I'll look at him and have no idea who he is. This happens to me from time to time, but it never used to. It started after we began couples therapy, what? Five years ago? I think maybe before that he felt too fused to me. But no, that's wrong too.



About six months after we had first married, when we were still untangling what we had done, but yet to see the beast in the middle, we were driving around Minneapolis in the winter over by Loring Park. It was the middle of the day, and the bells of the cathedral were going off. Ding-dong-ding-dong-ding-dong-ding-dong! And my husband, out of nowhere, driving, starts singing a little song along with the bells,

“Ha-ppy snow-man,” he sings, “ha-ppy snow-man.”

I look at him, “What is that?”

“Oh, I made it up when I was a little kid. That's what it felt like the bells were saying.”

And I turned my head away to look out my window, so I could cry without him seeing. Big, hot tears. The moment he sang it I knew he wasn't mine and never would be.

Even now the memory does something terrible to me, like when you love something so much you want to kill it. I could see him in my mind's eye singing that song to some other girl somewhere in time

and space. And my heart broke before my heart broke. It pre-cracked it. We were already on the road towards it; our weird, fierce love that would yield our weird, fierce marriage that would ultimately yield not nothing, but a breaking away, a circling back towards ourselves. My husband slips back into the ether.

## God Is Love

The other night I passed the Christian science reading room that I always pass when I take the 6 bus up Hennepin. Probably because it's Christmas time there was a giant handmade poster in the window with silver tinsel wrapped around it, saying "GOD IS LOVE!"

Seeing that sign hung with urgent, hopeful, crafty intent I felt a little vortex of darkness open up in my sternum. I looked out the other side of the bus window to see if I could give myself a moment to unpack that feeling, and saw a clear flash where the streetlights had just come on, like a little tunnel to another world. The sky was something I like to call 'dead north blue winter twilight,' which is a color I've only seen in Minnesota, and I was aware that everything was beautiful.

It isn't that God is a jerk if God is love, and it isn't that love is bullshit and therefore God is bullshit. I believe in both God and love. Maybe not conventionally, but I believe in both. I didn't think the statement was somehow disproving itself. In fact, something in the silver tinsel statement, a sentiment I'd seen and heard so many times, felt very true in a way it never had before.



I was so determined my love for my husband was never going to end that I stepped inside of love and zipped myself up in there. Turned it into my own fucking body bag. I was as true and faithful and stalwart to that love as you've heard in ten millions songs, and seen in ten million movies, and my true, faithful, stalwartness didn't do jackshit. Because I couldn't seal up my love for him and preserve it forever and ever, and eventually adherence to the idea of loving him became more important than actually loving him.



The best and truest and most beautiful thing I did in all those years

we were together, the absolute apex of the entire thing, what I did with the most love, was leave him. Turn the force of that love back on myself, shine a big spotlight into that gaping hole inside myself that I had dug by loving him without question for so long, and by finally letting the idea of our love, die.

It had died so long ago and now we could finally bury its little body.



Now there is a big weird open space inside of me. I look at it all the time. It hurts. All my ideas about love and God and healing and happiness were all uprooted. They are gone now. It hurts. I don't know what is supposed to be there now. I don't know what is going to grow there.

I don't expect it will ever not hurt. Because when I clear the stage of all the set pieces, all the backdrops, all the x's marking where you should stand. When I clear out the audience and turn out the stage lights, and it is just darkness, I realize that in this darkness there is space for anything. The hurt and the hope.



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