

crooked letter 15: Single-Minded

I write this for my lovers- past, present and future. I write this for my heart-broken friends. I write this for myself.

Lately, an inordinately large number of people I know are having their love lives break down on the side of the road. For some a roadside service gets it back and running. Others have had to tow it into the shop for major repairs that will take a long time and cost a lot. And a few are faced with the ugly decision to leave their broken down love on the side of the road to become a rusting metal marker. Here is a memorial-scrap-heap-milestone to a love that died.

I drive by my friends' wrecked loves. I pull over to help, but in these cases all I can do is listen as they scratch their heads or gnash their teeth or curse their fates over smashed heart parts. Not being entangled in a love relationship, I am relieved that I not out there covered in grease, cursing as I try to jack up a love that has gone flat.

Well, to say I'm not entangled would perhaps be untrue, but it is complicated and doesn't fit into a box. I am single.

I have had an interesting, often entertaining, sometimes painfully amusing entry into the dating world this fall. I have had rendezvous; at some desire is translated through flashing zeros and ones, at others flesh speaks directly to flesh. I have ongoing engagements with more than one person.

I am single. I have made no commitments, no promises. No one has made commitments or promises to me. I am no one's girlfriend, partner, significant other. I am single.

There are subtle shadings of single that I am cross-hatching with my pen as I write my life down. I am one person's extra (special) on the side lady friend. I sometimes wonder at what point one gets so close to another country that one can't help but cross over. I am scared that I will cross over. I wish I could easily brake my heart. I am afraid of crashing.

I want to be single-minded. I don't want a breakdown.

I write this for myself. I write this for my heart-broken friends. I write this for my lovers- past, present, future.

When I turned thirty-two, last September, I grieved. When I was younger, I imagined that by 32 I have a partner and perhaps have a child. And while I did have a boyfriend of almost three years, the relationship was at the- all right already, one of us has to be the first to jump out of this goddamned airplane, but fuck, it looks like a long, scary drop, and why don't we just hang out here in the no longer comfortable but well known hanger for just a little bit longer- place.

We were hanging onto each other for comfort. We were afraid of being alone. Even though we knew that after the jump we would land single but bonded as family by the exhilarating, daring mission to explore new country.

Last September, I hung with my hand wrapped over the hook that I needed to release so I could fall. It didn't help that Fortune had snuck a lead weight of depression into my parachute sack. I couldn't let go until April, after I managed to drop depression out of my pack and stopped grieving about passing over an arbitrary dateline.

I let go. I fall. I land on my feet in a tangle of fabric out of which I cut a shelter, a base camp. After exploring, I jot down my observations. I chart the geography of this land(ing). My three-year lover van and I use our lanterns to single back and forth that we are okay. It is comforting to know that he is out there sitting in his own tent, made out of a parachute that I helped him stitch, writing down his observations. We meet now and again to compare notes.

I write this for myself.

It is Friday night, and I'm at the Clock Restaurant. I sit by myself at a diner on a Friday night and for the most part I am content to be by myself. Oh, loneliness leaves small stains on my fingers as I write this; it is crumpled up in the paper napkins I used to wipe the crumbs and grease from my fingers.

Tonight I enjoy my own company. I am satisfied with the self-imposed task of putting ink to paper and trying to shake a little meaning out of all the conversations about love I have had in the past month.

I write this for all my lovers- past, present and future.

I have been re-reading old pieces of mine as I decide what I want to publish and what I might be able to finish now that depression has let go of me. Much of my work deals with longing, with desire, mainly sexual, but often tinged with a yearning for something more. I want the long haul. I want partnership.

But as I accept that my life has not played out in the expected trope of married with kids, as I am determined to find happiness, I have reframed my notions. I don't look to just one person for connection. I have a large community of friends that includes ex-lovers. I have decided not to date anyone exclusively. And even if a desired someone were to make a declaration of commitment that I accepted and returned, I have no plans to be monogamous. I want to be loved by more than one special someone. And I damn sure want to fuck more than one person.

This has caused some interesting snags in my dating life. I have found myself in the uncomfortable position of not wanting to expend the energy necessary to explain all the above to men more constrained by convention. I don't want to

spend time justifying my choices to someone I barely know, and who I have good reason to believe would be freaked out.

Recently on a "date," when I mentioned that Van is one of my best friend even though we've broken up, my "date" replied that was good for me, but that my next boyfriend might not like that so much. I replied, "I don't really give a fuck. I'm not going to date anyone who can't deal with it." And later on, we were talking about people cheating on their partners, and he was shocked that while I didn't think it was a good thing, I also didn't think it was the worst thing one could do to someone else either.

I decided to not waste my breath explaining that even at my most possessive and jealous, and believe you me, I've been possessive and jealous, I have never thought that sexual infidelity is a make it or break it deal. Maybe it was growing up watching my father shackled by his duty to my mentally ill mother and wishing he had an one the side sex-love relationship to make that duty more bearable. Maybe it is that I have always believed that a lasting relationship is about deep, abiding friendship and an ability to make a life together and that sexual desire might wax and wan.

Maybe it is because I choose to love people knowing that love changes, that there are no guarantees. Maybe it is because I know that my love is what I do, not what they do. I give my love with as a few strings as possible. Not no strings. But as few as I can.

I write this for my heart-broken friends.

A good friend of mine grieves for what has not happened. I listen. I offer some comfort. I offer my love. That is all I can do. It hurts to listen. It hurts to bear witness to another's pain. It hurts to remember that I grieved over these same wouldn't it have been nice if's. A part of me still grieves.

I have not had the comfort of regular physical intimacy for six years now. My three-year lover van lives three hours away. We saw each other about once a month, sometimes more, sometimes less.

While I have had dates here in town this fall none have lead to anything beyond a nice conversation or at worst grist for the mill. My ongoing engagements are with men who live far away.

It is easier when I am single-minded. When I enjoy being alone. It hurts too much to not be so. I am single-minded. This is a statement of strength. This is a weary defense against sadness.

I write this for

It is Christmas Eve, and I am terribly lonely. I wish that I was stronger, more self-contained. I went to the Clock. When I drove up to the restaurant and stepped out of the car, loneliness grabbed hold of my heart. It is only a little bit of an exaggeration to say that I almost fell down.

I had a grilled ham and cheese sandwich and a coke. I tried to read a pulp fantasy novel. I more successfully mapped out my artistic projects for the first half of next year. I was tolerably distracted from the fact that for the Bishops it always is an unmerry Christmas and that I had no honey to curl up with to sweeten a bitter holiday season.

I wish Santa would stuff my stocking. I want to fuck. To fuck so hard that I forget the heavy load of sad packages that is my family. To fuck so hard that I forget that I am lonely.

I write this

Without ever intending to, this fall I became “the other woman.” There is a man that I have spent an inordinate amount of time and energy entertaining, amusing, arousing. I spun so many lavish, florid fantasies for him. And while most of our interactions have been in the ghostly realm of zeros and ones flashing, our flesh met. We imprinted each other with smells and tastes and fluids. It was lovely.

I have been a diversion, an escape from the pressures of his partnership. He plays out a pattern; he strays from the one he loves only to find out how much he wants/needs/loves her. He has done this before. He does not outright lie, at least not to me, but the truth is told selectively. It is bent into a desired shape. I want the truth bent by him. I want to curve our interactions into a shape that reflect my desires for an ongoing relationship with him back to me.

I might not have gotten involved with him, if I had realized his relationship with his significant other was only kind of, sort of, I’d really rather you didn’t, open to outside engagements. I say might because I no longer know. We already had fucked- electronically and physically- before I understood how tentative her permission was. I continued fucking him- physically and electronically- after I knew this. If it just were about fucking, it would be easy to let go.

I never imagined I would be in this position. Oh, I’ve been caught in triangles before. My interpersonal life seems to *revolve* around triangles. My therapist probably would say it is because I triangulate my parents’ relationship. I am a stabilizing influence. Though I now sit in a more ethical sticky corner of a triangle.

I am set up to take a hit. I am the least important point of this figure. My corner is easily erased. Others have been in my position in the geometrical re-arrangement of their relationship from line to triangle back to line again. There is a slight possibility that a new pattern will be drawn connecting our points, that

there are dimensions that twist these lines, that bend this truth, into configurations that please everyone. I cannot count on creative relational geometry to be used in figuring out this particular problem.

I fantasized about meeting this man's partner, meeting her and kissing her. The how and where of it are left to hang in the background. This is fantasy after all. I imagine him walking up as I kiss her neck. I pull him down by his shirt collar, look him in the eye and say, "Kiss her neck." He bends over to kiss her, but looks at me as he does so. He grabs my hair and pulls my head toward his neck. He kisses her neck. I kiss his neck. It arouses me.

This has a snowball's chance in hell of happening. But in some ways it is what happened. I kiss his neck. He kisses her neck. I kiss his neck. He kisses her neck. I kiss his neck. He kisses her neck. I kiss his neck.

I write

After my thirty-third birthday, I began a wild rain dance of online activity to end a seven-month sex drought. During this dance, I:

- Went on six or seven real world face-to-face dates. None have lead to sex. None will lead to sex.
- Carried on more or less flirtatious correspondences with close to twenty men.
- Made friends with a handle of folks I wouldn't have met if I hadn't started this wacky dance.
- Had a quasi-anonymous phone sex encounter with a cretin
- Had the instant message equivalent of the one nightstand with two different people.
- Engaged in an ongoing sexy and friendly correspondence with a man overseas. This correspondence included a delightful instant message conversation about a girl being naughty in a candy shop.
- Got caught up in a just one of those things flings with as good as married British man that involved an intense exchange of emails, instant messages, pictures, videos made by me, webcam interactions and a five-day trip together in Central Florida. This is ongoing though tentative, disorienting and slightly heartbreaking.
- Established a "friends with benefits" situation with a delightful art freak who lives not too far away.
- Electronically fucked a man in the Midwest. This connection quite possibly will take me to his town for a sex radical skill share hosted there every spring.
- Watched three men show off their bodies to me via webcam. I reciprocated the favor with two of them.
- Fucked via IM five men.
- Fucked in the flesh two men.
- Fucked via phone two men.

- Counting all possible manner of physical and electronically mediated conjoining, fucked a total of seven men.

I flailed my arms and swung my head wildly. I danced up sexual thunderstorms. My twirling whipped up a hurricane. I am left dizzy, disoriented, oddly satisfied, intrigued, somewhat wiser and uncertain. While I danced, I still worked several day jobs, hung out with “real world” friends and family and made a lot of art. All my movement requires freedom.

Partner dancing requires a commitment of time and energy. Partner dancing ties one down. It is possible for others to cut in gracefully, for the dance to not be limited to only one person. But to move elegantly with another, one must focus more on that person, which means there is less for others, which means there is less for one’s self. I get more art done when I am single. Even in the midst of frantic sexual-romantic dance storms, I get more done than I would partnered.

I am not closing off the possibility of a committed relationship. I like the slow moving elegance of partner dancing. But since life is not at this point giving me that dance, I turn with anticipation and admittedly some sadness to learn new steps. What does it mean for me to be joyfully single? What can I do best alone? How many people can I fuck without going crazy? How does love shift when I no longer require it to be one way? What kind of love will be offered to me when I don’t have fairy tale ending expectations? What opens before me when I am on my own? What pleasures are there for my discovery?

I

Am single-minded.