

She remembered the way his body curved around hers, repositioning her grip. The gentle pressure of his hands on her hips as he lined her body up to the shot. His warm, soothing voice patiently instructing her as she pulled back the cue. The feel of it sliding through her fingers, the distinctive clap of contact, her joy as the ball slid into a pocket. This was her most persistent memory of him, the thrilling distraction of intimate contact.

She remembered the day she met her, and the instant connection that sparked between them. She remembered the way they had talked, all night long, sitting on the sidelines of the school gymnasium, or at a table in the cafeteria, while around them classmates joined in post-prom festivities. She remembered watching her play ping-pong, the way her beautiful breasts bounced as she moved. She remembered sneaking off for an against-the-rules cigarette, watching the way her lips closed over it, relishing the peek of her tongue, the shape of her mouth as she blew out the smoke.

She remembered stolen glances throughout long nights of work, the prickle of excitement shooting up her back when she felt his eyes upon her. She wondered if the others ever suspected, didn't know how they could have missed it. Playful remarks, passing contact lasting just a second too long, the almost palpable sense of longing that hung in the air between them. Their eternal dance of one step forward, two steps back.

She remembered the look of smoldering intensity in her eyes that night, pale blue darkening to the color of a midnight sky. She remembered the way their fingers met under the blanket as they sat, side by side, on the couch. The thrill of secret contact. The icy shiver that ran down her spine, the way her heart pounded, the clamminess of their joined hands. The excitement of a secret reflected in those incredible eyes, dark with unspoken desire.

She remembered late-night conversations, perched atop the backseat of her convertible outside their workplace. The heat where their arms and legs almost-but-not-quite touched. The underlying tension in their casual conversations. The way time stretched on forever in moments she never wanted to end. She remembered the awkwardness of their goodbyes, him standing just a little too close for comfort, her backing away into the safety of the car. Promises forever unfulfilled.

She remembered long pauses at the end of every conversation, both wanting but unable to say the words each longed to hear. Moments that lasted forever and ended too soon, the excruciating pressure of the emotion welling inside her, bursting to be declared. It happened on a cold, rainy February afternoon in a parking lot. *Who am I kidding? I love you.* Just like that, in a rush of nervous expulsion. The shock of finally hearing those words left her speechless. It was two days before she was able to say it back.

She remembered her seventeenth birthday, when he'd taken her golfing. Taught her with the same patience and gentle touches as he'd taught her pool. The almost unbearable intimacy of their interactions, the impenetrable barrier of her fears. Her eighteenth birthday, when she'd taken him to a concert. When he'd finally convinced her to try marijuana. He had always pressured her slightly about things like that, but never about herself. If she were to give herself to him, it would have to be on her terms, not his.

She remembered her nineteenth birthday, with as much clarity as her wine-addled mind could muster. It lived in her memory as it did at the time, as a haze of sensation, of hands and lips and tongues. Falling backwards onto the bed, hastily discarded clothing, and everything warm and wet and familiarly unfamiliar. A clumsy, fumbling confusion of touch and taste and scent, moans and whimpers and cries. The feel of her breasts and hips and waist, the way she contracted around her fingers, drawing her ever deeper. The exquisite, unimaginable intimacy.

She remembered midnight phone calls, buried under the covers, trying to hide from her own feelings, and his. Whispered promises of love. The fear and the longing warring within her. The way he looked at her; the way it made her stomach flip and her knees go weak. The poem he'd

written for her, the way she'd cried. The way he cried when she ended it, when the fear won. When she told him she didn't love him as he loved her.

She remembered picking out the rings, one for each of them. Knowing, with absolute certainty, that she wanted them to spend the rest of their lives together. The sensation of it sliding onto the third finger of her left hand, the unfamiliar way it rested there, and snagged on things. And every time it did she would smile and remember. The way it made her feel: safe and secure and loved. Moving in together, sinking into the easy comfort of an every day sort of love. Someone to come home to every night, legs twined together in sleep, fingers sliding through one another, the steady beat of her heart.

She remembered the long months of loneliness that followed the loss of the best friend she'd ever had, the one person who could cheer her no matter how black her mood. The pain of knowing how much she'd hurt him. The guilt of knowing that she did love him, would always love him. The joy of the rekindling of their friendship six months later, dampened by the sad knowledge that things would never be the same between them. The slow, almost imperceptible way that he'd drifted out of her life, for good.

As she lay wakeful in the darkest hours of the night, alone in the vastness of the bed they used to share, she remembered. She would never forget, felt as if she would never stop hurting. Sometimes, the pain was so intense she thought she was going to implode, and then the tears would come, each one feeling as if it were being squeezed out of her very heart by the steely grip of grief. She went over and over the list of things she'd done wrong, ways she'd driven her away, pushed her to the limits of what love can endure. She blamed and she hurt and she wished things could have been different. She turned the ring on her finger, comforted by its familiar presence, and pained by its insignificance.