

WHEN
SEX IS THE
ANSWER
TO EVERY
QUESTION

Love
Sick

SUE WILLIAM SILVERMAN

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About the Book

For Sue Silverman, the wrong places to look for love include: At the end of a phone, when a stranger calls in her college dorm late-night and asks what she's wearing. On a blue leather couch, with a senator, while an intern on Capitol Hill. In the back of a military truck, with a paratrooper, when hitching a ride across a desert on holiday. And still years later, in Room #213 of the Rainbow Motel, where she goes every Thursday lunchtime for routine sex with Rick (unbeknownst to Husband #2) ...

In *Love Sick*, her unflinching memoir of her 28 days in a clinic for female sex addicts, Sue revisits her past behaviour as she learns to put her demons behind and discover what love really means.

About the Author

Sue William Silverman is a professional speaker on addiction and child abuse, and teaches at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Sue has won an Association of Writers and Writing Programs award and her website is www.suewilliamsilverman.com.

Love Sick

SUE WILLIAM SILVERMAN



EBURY
PRESS

TO MARC SHEEHAN
for his poetry and grace

When sex is used for the wrong reasons a
spiritual problem is created.

CHARLOTTE DAVIS KASL

Was it doubted that those who corrupt their own
bodies conceal themselves?

WALT WHITMAN

*LAST
DAY
OUT*

EVERY THURSDAY AT noon I have sex with Rick in room #213 of the Rainbow Motel. Today, even though I promised my therapist I wouldn't come here again, I pull into the lot and park beside Rick's black Ford Bronco. I cut the engine and air conditioner and listen to stillness, to nothing, to heat. Sunrays splinter the windshield. Heat from the pavement rises, stifling, around the car, around me. No insects flutter in the brittle grass next to the lot. Trees don't rustle with bird wings. A neon rainbow, mute and colorless by day, arcs over a sign switched to VACANCY. Only the little girl from India, daughter of the motel owner, invigorates the stasis. Holding a string tied to a green balloon, she races down the diving board and leaps into the swimming pool. With the windows closed, I can't hear the splash. If she laughs, I can't hear this, either. For a moment she disappears. The balloon gaily sways above the water. The girl pops to the surface. She begins the game again.

The girl's energy exhausts me—as much as the stagnation of neon, air, time. I close my eyes. Still, I sense no darkness, no cool shadows, no relief from the scorching Georgia heat. Rather, a harsh light, white as a sheet, penetrates my lids as if I am caught in an unforgiving glare.

I worry the girl by the pool will see me. She's too young to know what I do here in the Rainbow Motel.

I should leave. I should leave here now. I should drive home and rinse pink gloss from my lips, wipe mascara from my lashes, change out of my too-short skirt and too-tight black lace blouse. I should cook a nourishing dinner for my husband. I should grasp the balloon and let it waft me across the sky, far from my implacable need for men. Dangerous men. Not physically dangerous. Emotionally dangerous. These men see me just as an object, a body. They are men incapable of love—even though I endlessly, addictively, try to convince myself that sex at noon for an hour with a married man *has* to be the real thing, must be love.

So I can't leave here. I need Rick. One last time. One last high. One last fix.

I should drive to the rehab unit and find my therapist right now.

Pausing outside the door of room #213, I hear the television: a car crash, urgent voices. I turn the knob and lock it behind me. Rick lies on the sheet smoking a cigarette, the remote beside him. He inhales. Exhales. Smoke swirls. I watch it disperse. An ash drifts onto the pillowcase. He doesn't notice. He hasn't stopped watching me since I entered.

He leans over and stubs out the cigarette. He clicks off the television and beckons me closer. A gold necklace nestles in his blond hair, a rich glitter of gold on gold as if chain mail emblazons his chest. Lying beside him, I curl short strands of his hair around my finger as if, in all this incandescence, we radiate love. His Eau Sauvage cologne is the only scent in the world I will ever need or want. I close my eyes, drenched in it. In him. I must feel Rick's touch, a drug surging through veins, trancing me as I urgently swallow oblivion and ether. Sex, a sweet amnesiac.

The elixir drains through my body, thin as a flame. I crave this, need him—or You, Man, whoever You are—until I’m blissfully satiated. . . .

Is this bliss?

I open my eyes. He’s leaning over me, his palm on the pillow beside my head. I can hear the second hand of his watch ticking beside my ear. His breath numbs the hollow at the base of my neck. Sweat gathers on his temples. The necklace taps my chin as he fucks me. A gift from his wife? I wonder. He kisses me. Strokes me. But this is just a repetition of all the other times with Rick. Nothing unusual. Just the basics. Routine sex. He doesn’t even bother to try to impress me with fancy positions like Crushing Spices. Flower in Bloom. Dear to Cupid. Just the missionary position. Sometimes sixty-nine—but all Rick wants is to get the job done. Quickly.

Not that I mind. *I don’t do this for pleasure. I do this for love.*

Except I feel a damp chill between my shoulder blades—thinking of all the times my spine has creased this mattress—so many mattresses. The second hand ticks. He pushes up on his elbows, his head above mine. He glances down, focusing more on my torso than on me. I hug him tighter. Feel *me*. See *me*. I touch his throat with the tip of my tongue. His skin tastes like salt water and indigo. My limbs feel weighted with leaden male gravity. Smothered. I feel as if I sink below water, far beneath a night sea.

Can’t I understand that this, what we do here, has only, ever, been numbed emotions of familiar strangers, fucking? Why can’t I accept the difference between this and love? How can love be two bodies wrapped in a sheet that’s singed by careless cigarettes, here, in a room with plastic curtains, tin ashtrays, base metal, stained carpet, bad alchemy, artificial air, and a television promoting the same pornographic movies every hour on the hour? Here in a

room when, by one o'clock, Rick looks depleted, the blue of his eyes seeming to have bled beneath the skin.

Rick retrieves a Polaroid camera from a small gym bag. He aims it at me, still lying in bed, my head propped on the pillow. He jokes: "Smile." I stare straight into the lens. In the flash I am dazed, as if I've imploded.

I know he needs this photo like a stash, a memento, in order to remember while I'm gone.

Tomorrow morning I am to enter an inpatient treatment facility where I must remain sexually sober for twenty-eight long days. I don't want to go. But if I don't, I'll remain addicted to sex, to men, to dangerous men. My therapist, whom I've been seeing for almost a year, says I must go. For out here, loose in the world, I haven't been able to stop on my own.

Rick goes to shower.

Pieces of my body surface in the Polaroid. My neck down to my knees. I want to be pleased. For only when my body is desired do I feel beautiful, powerful, loved. Except I *don't* feel powerful, loved, or whole now. I feel shy, embarrassed, exhausted. Less. Yes, as if I am less than a body. For right now my body seems to exist only in this Polaroid.

For months, like a mantra, my therapist has told me, "These men are killing you." I don't know if he means emotionally, spiritually, or physically. I don't ask. He explains that I confuse sex with love, compulsively repeating this destructive pattern with one man after another. I do this because as a girl I learned that sex is love from my father, the first dangerous man who sexually misloved me.

"I thought the intensity with Rick *must* be love," I say.

"The intensity is an addict's 'high,'" my therapist says. "Not love." To numb the shame and fear associated both with the past and with my current sexual behavior, I

medicate, paradoxically, by using sex, he explains. “But sometimes that ‘high’ stops working. Usually after a scary binge.”

Like last Thursday at Rick’s house.

Rick and I didn’t meet at the Rainbow Motel. His son was home from school with the flu, and Rick took the day off from work to stay with him. Rick and I undressed in the bedroom he shares with his wife, while his son slept in his room down the hall. The house was hushed. The door to the bedroom locked. But then I heard a small sound: his son crying.

Rick heard him, too. I expected Rick to rush to him. We wouldn’t have sex. Instead, we would read his son a story. I wanted to read his son a story. Give him a glass of water. I wanted to give him a glass of water. Press a washcloth to his cheeks. I paused, sure I felt his son’s fever, damp and urgent. He needed his father.

His father didn’t need him.

Rick’s hands tugged at belts and zippers: hurry. We *will* do this . . . even though his son might get out of bed, knock on the door, see me leave his parents’ bedroom. What I then forced myself to know was that *this*, this one careless act of sex, was more important to Rick than his son. And because I, too, couldn’t say no, because I feared Rick would leave me if I refused him sex, I began to know, had to accept, that sex was more important to me, too. In a moment of clarity I realized that, while the sober part of me wanted to attend his son, a tangled, humid, inescapable part stopped me. Time stalled: with Rick’s hands forever on his belt buckle; with my fingers always on the zipper of my skirt.

And a moment later, I no longer heard his son crying.

The next therapy session I told my therapist, Ted, about Rick’s son. More: I confessed that I’d been secretly meeting Rick for weeks without telling him, Ted. I couldn’t stop. Before I’d left Ted’s office, he called the inpatient unit

where he worked and scheduled my admittance. He told me it wasn't possible for him to work with clients who showed up for a session "drunk" or "hungover." He could no longer see me as an outpatient; he could only help me in the rehab unit. "To have *real* feelings, you have to be sexually sober," he said. "Not numbed out." Afraid to be abandoned by Ted, beginning to accept the emotional destructiveness of my behavior, I agreed to go.

Now, as I cross the motel parking lot, dingy afternoon light fuses my blouse to my sweaty back. All I want is to sleep it off. My footsteps sound hollow. My mouth tastes contaminated, metallic. The little girl and her green balloon are gone. Without her energy, the pool is a flat, glassy sheen. Driving from the lot, I pass the neon sign, silently spelling RAINBOW MOTEL.

I should never return here; yet I can't imagine not meeting Rick every Thursday at noon. For what I do in room #213 is the only reason, I believe, a man would love me . . . *what my father taught me was love.*

That evening my husband and I eat a silent dinner at the kitchen table. Andrew sits erect, solid, focused on a Braves baseball game on the portable television, while I hunch over my plate. Andrew takes angry bites of an overdone hamburger, the third one I fixed this week, and canned string beans, all I managed to prepare after returning from the motel. I nibble at an edge of hamburger and spear one bean onto my fork. I put it down without eating. Looking at all the food, I think I might be sick. Fumes from the motel seem to rise from the hem of my skirt. My body feels sticky and smudged. It feels unhealthy. Andrew seems not to see, pretends not to notice, this mess that is me. Or, yes, he notices. But he never asks questions. He is too afraid of the answers.

"Sorry about the dinner," I say.

He isn't angry about the affairs; he doesn't know about them. He's angry about my emotional disarray. He wants me to be industrious and smiling. Normal. I worry, even with therapy, I won't learn how to love him the way I should, won't learn how to act like a wife.

"I was wondering," I say, during a television commercial break, "maybe you could drive me over there tomorrow and help me get settled."

"I can't just not teach my classes." His fingers grip the fork.

I want to touch his hand, loosen the grip, warm our fingers.

"I need to finish grading papers." He pushes back his chair. "Remember to call your parents, tell them where you're going," he says. His six-foot body fills the doorway. "I wouldn't know what to say if they call here looking for you."

I scrape my uneaten hamburger and beans into the garbage. Nothing to clean from Andrew's plate, only a smear of ketchup, a few bread crumbs. I squeeze Ivory liquid soap onto the sponge and wash several days' worth of dishes. With a Brillo pad I scour the long-encrusted broiler pan. I sprinkle Comet in the stained sink. I set Andrew's blue cereal bowl on the counter next to his coffee mug, ready for his breakfast in the morning. I want to do more: mop linoleum, polish hardwood floors. I *want* to try harder to please Andrew. I never can. There's always a distraction, always a Rick, or someone. Now, tonight, I feel the burden of calling my parents, the burden of going to the hospital, press against my back. I feel as if I've lost all my muscles.

I turn on the lamp in the living room and sit on our Victorian couch. I pick up the telephone and dial my parents' number. My mother answers on the second ring. Even though my parents know I'm in therapy, I've never said the word *incest* aloud in their presence. Whenever I

visit, once or twice a year, we still eat dinner on pretty Wedgwood plates the way we always did. We are silently confused with each other, or else we speak as if no one heard my father turn the doorknob on all my childhood bedrooms . . . never heard the door click shut all those nights.

Now I say to my mother that I have something important to tell her. There is a pause before she answers, "Sure, honey," then places her hand over the receiver. She calls to my father, who picks up the extension. "Hi, precious," he says to me.

I tell them there's nothing to worry about. I've just been depressed and need to go away for about a month. "I'll be at this treatment facility where my therapist works."

"I don't understand," my mother says. "I thought you said you've been doing so much better."

I have told them this lie. They are paying for my therapy sessions, and I want them to think they're getting their money's worth. Ironically, they want me to feel better even as they never ask why I need therapy in the first place.

"How do you know this therapist knows what he's doing?" my father says. "He doesn't know anything about you."

This therapist knows my life is out of control, I want to say. He knows I'm afraid to eat, can't feed my body. He knows I fuck men because it's what *you* taught me is love.

Father, this therapist knows *everything*. About you.

The back of my neck is sweaty, and I coil my hair around my fist. Quizzle, my cat, jumps on the couch and curls beside me.

I barely hear my voice. "He knows I don't know how to love right," I say.

"What kind of people would be in a place like that?" he says.

The more he speaks, the more weightless my head feels, the more sluggish my body. My stomach cramps: with

hunger, with fear. I don't know if I can do this.

"People like *me*," I whisper.

"I won't hear about this," he says.

"Dad, wait. My therapist said he'll want to schedule a family session. I mean, I know you can't come down here, but we'll do it on the phone. Like a conference call."

"If he wants a meeting, tell him to send me an agenda."

"That's not exactly how it's done."

"Then how can I know what we're going to talk about?"

What do you think we're going to talk about?

The phone clicks.

I know we'll never have a family session, even on the phone.

"Mom?"

"I'm still here."

"You think he's really angry?"

"Can't you call him from the hospital *without* these therapists?"

My therapist has told me I'm to have no unsupervised contact with my father while in the hospital. No contact with Rick, either.

"How about I'll send you flowers?" she adds.

I don't want flowers. I don't want presents. All you give are presents. You gave *me* as a present. To your husband. By feigning illness and staying in bed, your eyes shut, the door closed, you could pretend not to notice how you made me available to your husband—a gift—a little-girl wife.

"Mother, I don't want flowers, I want . . ."

"What?"

The impossible: a real father; a mother who saw what she saw, knew what she knew. Even though the last time my father touched me sexually was when I left home for college some twenty-five years ago, it feels as if I've never left that home at all.

"Just to get better, I guess," I answer.

“Well, be sure to pack a warm robe and slippers,” my mother says. “Bring plenty of vitamin C. You know how cold they keep those places.” I am about to hang up when she adds, “Oh, and call your sister. She’s doing so well in her new job.”

I put down the phone and sink back into the velvet cushion on the couch. I grew up in pretty houses decorated with art objects my father bought on his many travels; how easily our family hid its secrets behind carved wood masks from Samoa, straw fans from Guam. How successful we seemed, with elegant tea sets from Japan, silk curtains from Hong Kong. Now Andrew and I have nice antiques, an Oriental rug, watercolor paintings. *Things*. I was raised to believe that if a family appears perfect, it must *be* perfect. I have tried to keep up appearances.

I open the door to Andrew’s study. He doesn’t look up. He is an English professor, and he sits at his desk grading student papers. I lean over his shoulder and wrap my arms around his chest. I tell him I called my parents, that my father hung up, that my mother worries I’ll catch cold. He sighs, and doesn’t put down his pencil.

I straighten and lean against his desk. Bookcases jammed with volumes by James Joyce, Thomas Pynchon, Tolstoy, Cervantes, Jane Austen, Derrida, Riffaterre, Kant, line the walls like thick insulation. He is writing a book of his own, evolved from his dissertation. I have typed the manuscript several times for him, several revisions. I have proofread it twice. Yet I only have a vague understanding of what it’s about.

Even though I married Andrew for his cool distant silence—so different from my father’s needy raging—now, this moment, I want to get his attention. I want to say: Look at me! I want to crack the silence of our marriage and reveal to him the *complete* reason my therapist says I must enter the hospital now: to be sequestered, quarantined,

from men. But I can't tell Andrew. For I believe if he sees the real me, he'll leave me. All he knows for sure is that I'm entering treatment because what happened to me as a child caused an eating disorder and I hate food.

I turn, about to close the door to his study. "I'm sorry," is all I'm able to say. "You know?"

"Look, I'm sure it'll be fine," he says. "Call me when you get there. Let me know you made it okay."

Later I lie awake, where I sleep by myself, in a small second-story bedroom. The attic fan whooshes air from the basement up through the house and out the windows, out the vents in the gable. The house feels vacant. Andrew sleeps directly below me in a king-sized bed. I roll onto my stomach in my narrow bed and press my fingertips against the wood floor. I want to feel a quiet vibration from his breath. I want to tiptoe down the stairs and slip beneath the covers beside him. I want the scent of his freshly laundered sheets on my own body, his clean, strong hand to hold mine. I want to feel a reassuring, constant presence of this man labeled "husband." I don't know how. Ordinary married life is too tame and mild. I want to hold on to him, but Andrew, as well as our ten-year marriage, only skims the periphery of my senses.

Initially I moved in with Andrew because he asked me. I was searching for love, even though I was married to someone else at the time. But bored with my first marriage, I thought all I needed to be happy was to switch partners. After a divorce and living together about a year, Andrew and I decided to marry. The morning of our wedding, however, I awoke with a headache, my muscles stiff with the responsibility of maintaining a relationship: yes, too ordinary, committed, boring. Not as intense or exciting—not as short-lived—as a one-night stand or an affair. Scant weeks before the wedding I'd even come close to having sex with the president of a company where I was doing "temp" work for \$4.50 an hour. I'm not sure why I said no

to that president, except maybe this time I really wanted to make a stab at marriage.

I'd ordered my "wedding dress" out of a catalogue. It was a red cotton floral outfit, marked down to nineteen dollars.

Andrew urged me to buy something nicer. I couldn't.

How could I tell him I bought the dress because *I* felt marked down? How could I wear white or cream or tan when red is my true color?

Three-thirty in the morning. The silence of our house, our marriage, wells up around me. Night is a thick humid wall. I need a way out. I push back the sheet and retrieve a lavender wood box I've hidden for years in my closet. I sit on the floor. Inside the box is my stash—stuff hoarded for when I need a fix—these mementos of men almost as good as a real man. Letters, photos, jewelry, books, pressed flowers. A maroon cashmere scarf that an older married man gave me when I was a college student in Boston. I drape the scarf around my neck.

From my dresser I remove khaki shorts, underwear, socks, a few wrinkled T-shirts, a pair of gray sweats, and place them in my canvas suitcase. I slide my fingers along metal hangers in the closet. Short skirts. Silk and lacy blouses. Rainbow Motel blouses. I also own blazers and oxford shirts, professional clothes, from various past jobs, even though I am currently unemployed. Size-four dresses to clothe my anorexic body. Size-eight for when I'm eating. But little in this closet is appropriate for a hospital. On a shelf in the back I find an oversized white T-shirt with the stenciled message: STRANDED ON THE STRAND. It is so old the seams are splitting, the print fading. I bought it in Galveston, where I once lived, in an area called the Strand. I always read the message literally: I have felt stranded. Everywhere. I decide to wear it tomorrow.

I tuck the maroon scarf between the shirts in my suitcase.

Next to my bedroom is the bath. I collect deodorant, toothbrush, toothpaste, comb. No makeup. Not even lipstick for this new sober self I will try to create tomorrow. In the medicine cabinet is my supply of Gillette single-edged razor blades. Why not? The metal feels cool, comforting. The blades are to slice small cuts in my skin. How peaceful, whenever I drift into a trance of silver razors, obsessed with watching slivers of blood trail down my thighs. Small hurts always distract me from the larger hurts. Blood, starvation, promiscuity, are *managed* pain, meant to relieve larger, *unmanageable* pain.

I slip a razor blade under the bar of Dove soap in my pink plastic soap dish and put it in my suitcase.

DAY ONE

THE NEXT MORNING, when the door to the rehab unit shuts behind me, I feel trapped. I feel exposed in the shock of fluorescent light. I can't move. Away from the comforting silence of my room at home, there's too much noise and movement to comprehend what anyone is doing or saying. Women, a blur of voices and colors, rush down the hall. One woman, who must be anorexic, lags behind. She's bundled in heavy sweats to warm her emaciated frame, and pushes an I.V. pole on wheels, a bag of Ensure hanging from the prongs. A tube runs from the Ensure into her nostrils. It occurs to me: this is not a joke.

I step back and grip the doorknob. This place isn't for me, it's for other women, far worse off than myself. After all, I only agreed to come here because Ted said I had to. I am about to back out the door when a man, his hair in a black braid, pries my canvas suitcase from my grasp and carries it away. A nurse propels me into the medical doctor's office.

I'm given a hospital gown, told to remove my clothes. Urine samples. Blood. My temperature is taken to see if I'm freezing to death like that anorexic woman. I'm told to stand on a scale, backward, so I can't see my own weight. My height is measured. I lie on an examination table and

the nurse sticks suction cups to my chest for an EKG. I'm given a pelvic. I'm told to open my mouth. A wood stick is placed on the back of my tongue. I gag. To my empty stomach, even this tastes like food. They check for electrolyte imbalance. Dehydration. Traces of alcohol. Drugs. Cancer. Viruses. STDs.

Bone density tests. A mammogram. X rays.

Pictures of my body.

Don't bother, I want to say. That smutty Polaroid of my torso, inert on a bed, available, could tell them everything they want to know about ribs, spine, elbows, throat, knees—body parts I always believed equaled me.

I am handed forms to fill out: *What did you eat last night for dinner? What did you eat for breakfast? How many hours of sleep did you get last night?*

"Steak, potatoes, apple pie," I write in the first blank.

"Eggs, bacon, orange juice, cereal, hash browns, toast," I write in the second.

"8 hours," I write in the third.

My thin fingers can barely grasp the pen. I am shivering and want to ask for my sweatshirt, but I can't speak. I don't know how to ask where they've taken my suitcase.

When did you last have sex?

"This is a tough question," I write in the blank space.

How many sexual partners have you had in your lifetime?

I need a calculator. No, it's okay, I soothe myself. Lie. I decide to include just the men I saw more than once. The men I saw more than twice. The ones that at least gave the illusion of a relationship. I wonder if I'm supposed to count husbands. Do they mean my father? On the palm of my hand I begin to print names, counting. I write the number "15" in the blank. I cross it out. "10."

Have any of these sexual partners ever physically abused you or caused you pain? Do you ever use "props" such as whips or chains?

“Of course not,” I write, pleased to find at least one question I can answer truthfully.

How do you define a sexual extramarital affair?

“LOVE,” I write in the blank space.

When did you last menstruate?

I have no idea. Since I don’t want to even consider the possibility of pregnancy, I pay no attention to cycles. I pay no attention to my body.

This isn’t true.

I pay *intimate* attention to my body: decorating it, scenting it—a fantasy body created for fantasy men.

Rather, it is to *this* body I’ve paid no attention, the one here, now, under unrelenting lights. *This* body in a drab hospital gown is neither decorated nor perfumed. It is my real body here in the hospital that I don’t understand: the one that looks plain and simple.

I write, “None of this matters,” in the blank and put down the pen.

To come to the hospital today, I dressed this supposedly sober body in khaki shorts and the white STRANDED ON THE STRAND T-shirt. I yanked my curly auburn hair into a severe ponytail. I did not bother to tie the laces of my red leather Reeboks. Now when I finish filling out the forms, I put on these clothes again and sit by the door. The nurse returns with my Gillette single-edged razor in a plastic bag. Like evidence at the trial of a guilty defendant. I now realize that the man with the black braid had taken my suitcase to search it.

“That’s just to shave my legs,” I say to the nurse.

She pauses before speaking. I know she knows I’m lying. “They can go without being shaved for twenty-eight days,” she says.

I lower my lids, ashamed. Under the fluorescent light I cast no shadow. This unit, me, my body: we are all being blanched by truth.

She hands me a sheet of paper. "Unit Guidelines." *Rules? Quickly I skim it . . . must be with a "buddy" at all times, no overeating, no starving, no vomiting, no masturbating, doors to rooms must be kept ajar, must participate in all groups and activities, no Spandex tights, no leotards, no tank tops, no smoking, no caffeine, no sugar, no antacids, no vitamins . . .*

"My mother told me to bring my vitamins," I say.

"We'll give you what you need here," the nurse says.

She points me toward the group room, where I'm to meet Ted, my therapist. I walk alone to the end of the hall.

I slouch in a wing chair across from Ted. We are alone in the lounge furnished with ordinary pink and gray upholstered couches and armchairs, lamps with white shades, gray industrial carpet. Prints of butterflies are hung on the walls.

Ted waits for me to speak. Even with the door shut, I hear laughter and voices in the corridor. Even with windows closed, I hear traffic rumble along the parkway. How can I speak in this confusion of sound? I wonder if I can remain mute for twenty-eight days. I don't know what to say. Even after months of therapy, I struggle to trust this most trustworthy man I know—in his ordinary blue shirt, blue slacks, white Nikes, his hair the color of warm copper. His sky blue eyes are clear, honest, neither dangerous nor mysterious. His truth is basic, straightforward: stay sober; stay safe.

"How's it going so far?" His voice is both firm and gentle.

"They searched my suitcase."

Ted's pen makes a scratching sound as he writes on his yellow legal pad. "What did they find?"

I shrug. "I wish it could be like before. Seeing you out there." I nod toward the window.

"You weren't doing too well out there." Then he reminds me of the agreement I made the first time I saw him: if I