

SOPHIE CALLE

True Stories



ACTES SUD

TRUE STORIES

56 short stories

BY THE SAME AUTHOR PUBLISHED BY ACTES SUD:

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, 2007

BLIND, 2011

VOIR LA MER, 2013

GHOSTS, 2013

DETACHMENT, 2013

TRUE STORIES, 2013, 2016

MY ALL, 2015

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The last sentence in the text on p. 75, "The Other", is a quotation from Rainer Maria Rilke.

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SOPHIE CALLE

True Stories

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~~I lived with a man for seven years. He left.
Definitively. Soon after, my friend Cathy met a
stranger in a bar. She thought I would like him. She
asked him for his address to give me as gift, offering
me one of the most romantic episodes of my life.~~

~~In this providential stranger.~~

Through new editions, this dedication, which is no
longer the reality, stayed in place.

I dedicate this book, nine years later, to Bob Calle,
definitively the providential man of my life.



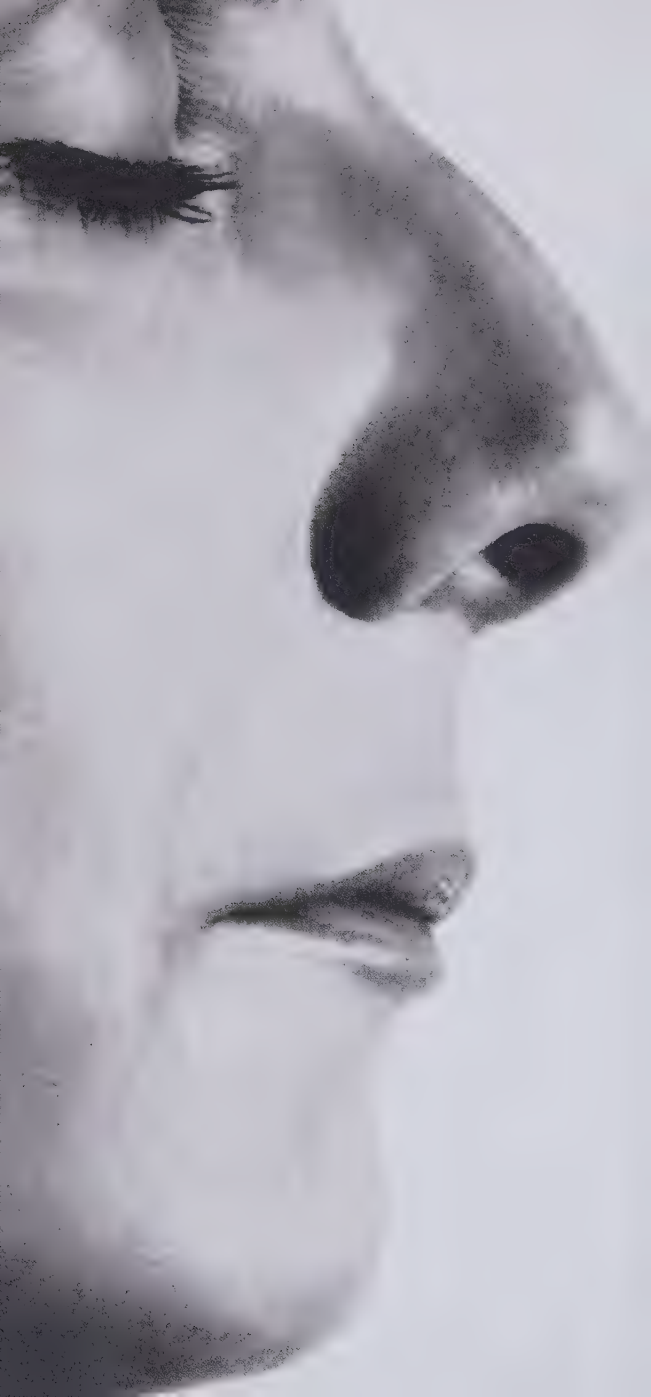
The Dutch Portrait

I was nine years old. While rummaging through my mother's letters I found one, addressed to her, which started like this: "Darling, I trust you are seriously thinking about a boarding school for our Sophie." The letter was signed by a friend of my mother. I assumed from this that he was my real father. Whenever he came to visit us, I would sit on his knee and, with my eyes deep in his, I would wait for a confession. But his total lack of response caused me at times to have doubts. Then I would re-read the stolen letter. I had hidden it behind the picture in the dining room, a fifteenth century Flemish painting entitled *Luce de Montfort*, which portrayed a young woman in a pink bodice, her face slightly turned to show her left profile while her eyes looked straight at you, her features framed by a white, starched linen coif.



The Red Shoes

Amelie and I were eleven years old. We had a habit of stealing from department stores on Thursday afternoons. We did this for one year. When her mother began to suspect, in order to frighten us, she said that a policeman had spotted us and reported our activities to her. But because of our age, he was giving us a second chance. He would now follow us, and if we stop stealing, he would forget about the past. In the following weeks, we spent most of our time wondering who the policeman hidden among all the people around us was. In our attempts to lose him, we were now too busy to steal. Our last robbery had been a pair of red shoes too big for us to wear. Amelie kept the right shoe, and I kept the left.



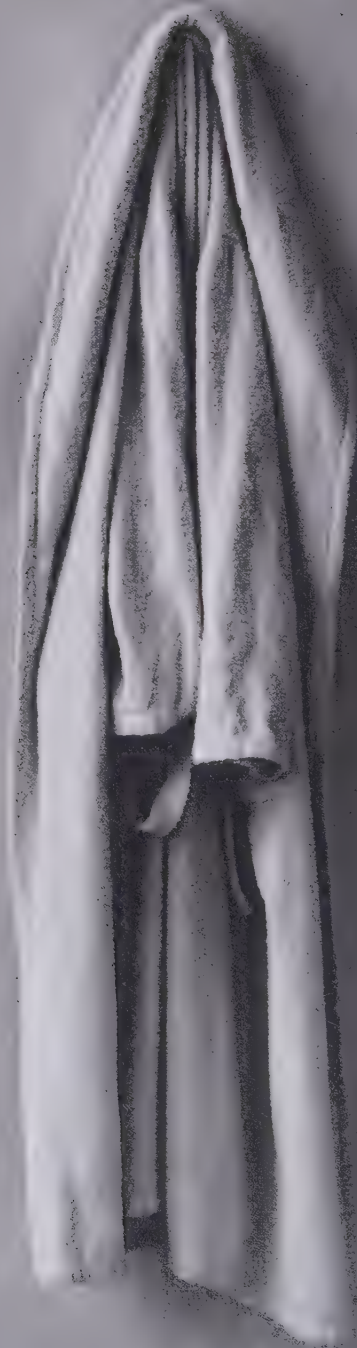
The Plastic Surgery

When I was fourteen my grandparents suggested that I needed plastic surgery. They made an appointment with a famous cosmetic surgeon, and it was decided that my nose should be straightened, that a scar on my left leg should be covered up with a piece of skin taken from my ass and that my ears should be pulled back. I had doubts, but they reassured me, I could change my mind up until the very last moment. In the end, though, it was Doctor F. himself who put an end to my dilemma. Two days before the operation, he committed suicide.



Young Girl's Dream

When I was fifteen I was afraid of men. One day, in a restaurant, I chose a dessert because of its name: "Young Girl's Dream." I asked the waiter what it was, and he answered: "It's a surprise." A few minutes later he returned with a dish featuring two scoops of vanilla ice cream and a peeled banana. He said one word: "Enjoy." Then he laughed. I closed my eyes the same way I closed them years later when I saw my first naked man.



The Bathrobe

I was eighteen years old. I rang the bell. He opened the door. He was wearing the same bathrobe as my father. A long white terry cloth robe. He became my first love. For an entire year, he obeyed my request, and never let me see him naked from the front. Only from the back. And so, in the morning light, he would get up carefully, turning himself away, and gently hiding inside the white bathrobe. When it was all over he left the bathrobe behind with me.



The Striptease

I was six. I lived on a street named Rosa-Bonheur with my grandparents. A daily ritual obliged me every evening to undress completely in the elevator on my way up to the sixth floor where I arrived without a stitch on. Then I would dash down the corridor at lightning speed, and as soon as I reached the apartment, I would jump into bed. Twenty years later I found myself repeating the same ceremony every night in public, on the stage of one of the strip joints that line the boulevard in Pigalle, wearing a blonde wig in case my grandparents, who lived in the neighborhood, should happen to pass by.



The High Heel

I was twenty-seven years old. I was hired as a striptease artist in a traveling carnival that was set up for the Christmas holidays at the corner of Boulevard de Clichy and Rue des Martyrs. I was supposed to undress eighteen times a day between 4:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m. On



January 8, 1981, as I was sitting on the only chair in the trailer, one of my colleagues, to whom I refused to give my seat, tried to poke my eyes out with her high heel and ended up kicking me in the head. I lost consciousness. During the fight, she had, as the ultimate stage of stripping, torn off my blonde wig. This was to be my last performance in the profession.



The Razor Blade

I posed nude every day for a drawing class, from 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon. And each day, a man who was always seated in the first row, on my far left, drew me for three hours. At noon he would take a razor blade out of his pocket and compulsively slash the drawing he had made. I would watch. Then he would leave the room. The drawing would remain on the table as evidence. This was repeated every day for twelve days. On the thirteenth day, I didn't go to work.

The Love Letter

For years a love letter languished on my desk. I had never received a love letter, so I paid a public scribe to write one. Eight days later, I received seven beautiful pages of pure poetry penned in ink. It had cost me one hundred francs and the man said: "...as for myself, without moving from my chair I was everywhere with you."



The Cats

I had three cats. Felix died after having been accidentally locked in the fridge. Zoe was taken from me when my younger brother was born; I hated him from that moment on. Nina was strangled by a jealous man who had, some time before, given me the following ultimatum: to sleep, either with the cat or with him. I opted for the cat.



The Bed

It was my bed. The one in which I slept until I was seventeen. Then my mother put it in a room she rented out. On October 7, 1979,



the tenant lay down on it and set himself on fire. He died. The firemen threw the bed out the window. It was there, in the courtyard of the building, for nine days.



The Wedding Dress

I always admired him. Silently, since I was child. One November 8th—I was thirty years old—he allowed me to pay him a visit. He lived several hundred kilometers from Paris. I had brought a wedding dress in my valise, white silk with a short train. I wore it on our first night together.



The Pig

It's a silly story. I was about thirty. A man phoned to say that he and I were making similar work and that we should meet. I always worry I might miss out on something so I agreed. When he arrived he told me his art consisted of stopping women in the street and asking them to sleep with him. Well, he said, wasn't one of my projects all about getting strangers to spend time in my bed? He told me he was taking me to a barbecue. I spent the whole evening playing the maid, grilling sausages, serving and cleaning up. Time goes by faster when you're busy. Later he dropped me off outside my door. He leaned in to me and sought my lips. I pushed him away. "What makes you think I'd want to kiss you?" I protested. "Well anyway," he answered, "you eat like a pig." Even today, after all these years, his words haunt me. I can't remember a thing about him, yet he's still sitting at my table.

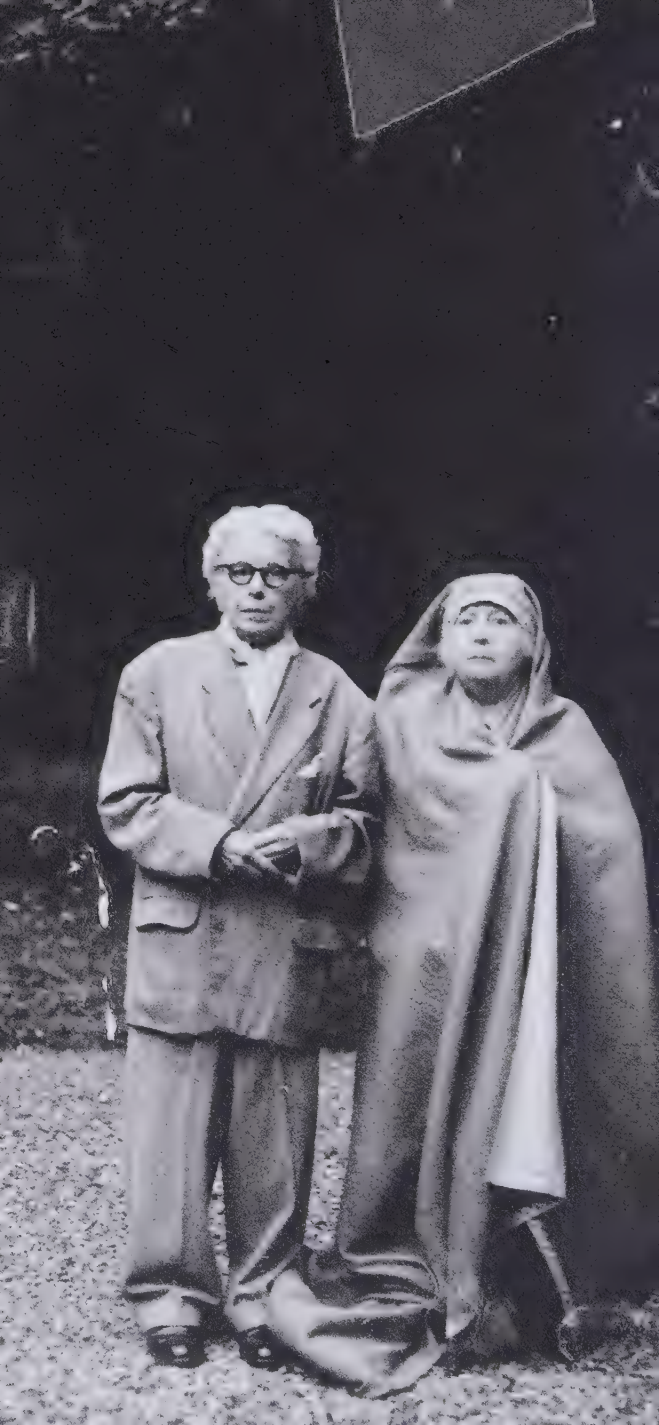


The Bad Breath

I was thirty, and my father thought I had bad breath. He made an appointment for me with a doctor whom he assumed was a general practitioner. However, when I arrived at his office, I immediately realized that he was a psychoanalyst. Given the hostility my father



always expressed towards this profession, I was surprised. “There must be some mistake,” I said. “My father is convinced I have bad breath and he sent me to a GP.” The man replied: “Do you always do what your father tells you to do?” And so I became his patient.



Saw Nothing—Nobody

Some time in 1984 I received a call from a stranger by the name of Mâkhi. She wanted me to go to the apartment where the two sisters who “adopted” her had lived and, within six months of each other, died, both aged 90. Mâkhi had inherited their possessions but for months had put off this first visit to a place haunted by their decrepitude, their death and their ghosts. I went there for her sake. I photographed the abandoned house so I could give her the images of what she was frightened to see. I asked to keep the sisters’ portrait and some diaries. The entry for December 25, 1980, said: “Saw Nothing—Nobody.” And, for 1981: “Christmas—Nothing.”

The Tie

I saw him for the first time in December 1985, at a lecture he was giving. I found him attractive, but one thing bothered me: he was wearing an ugly tie. The next day I anonymously sent him a thin brown tie. Later, I saw him in a restaurant; he was wearing it. Unfortunately, it clashed with his shirt. It was then that I decided to take on the task of dressing him from head to toe: I would send him one article of clothing every year at Christmas. In 1986, he received a pair of silk gray socks; in 1987, a black alpaca sweater; in 1988, a white shirt; in 1989, a pair of gold-plated cufflinks; in 1990, a pair of boxer shorts with a Christmas tree pattern; nothing in 1991; and in 1992, a pair of grey trousers. Someday, when he is fully dressed by me, I would like to be introduced to him.



The Neck.

He wanted to take my picture with his Polaroid. When the image appeared, there was visible a red line marking my neck. I took the photograph away from him and for the next few days, I remained rather mistrustful. Two weeks later, one night, a man tried to strangle me. He left me lying unconscious on the sidewalk. I recognized that same man, three days later, in a bar. He rushed over apologizing, insisting that it was all a mistake, and suggested that I become the godmother of the baby he was expecting imminently.

SAM
16 AOUT

DIM
17 AOUT

LU
18 AOUT



Samedi
à 20.35
Peter Falk



2
Mardi
à 20.35
Yves Montand



3
Lundi
à 20.35
Annie Girardot



5
Jeudi
à 20.35
Erik Estrada



6
Mercredi
à 17.00
Francis Lalonde



C+
Mercredi
à 21.00
Jean YVES

20.35 **COLUMBO**
Question d'honneur
avec
Peter Falk,
Ricardo Montalban,
Pedro Armendariz

20.35 **TOUTES FOLLES DE LUI**
présenté par Christophe
Dechavanne
avec
Jeanne Manson, Al Corley,
Etienne Daho, Lio,
Richard Bohringer

20.00 **FESTIVAL INTERCULTUREL
DE L'ORIENT**
présenté par
Christian Rolland
avec
Dan ar Bras, The Pogues
le groupe Run Rig

21.30 **KOJAK**
Crime de lèse-majesté
avec
Telly Savalas, Dan Frazer,
Kevin Dobson

19.00 **NRJ 6**
avec
Catherine Lara
22.00 **LIVE 6**
avec
Elvis Presley

20.30 **JE CHERCHE
APRÈS PICONE**
de Nanni Loy
avec
Giancarlo Giannini,
Lino Sassi,
Claia Rondinella

20.30 **LE GRAND RESTAURANT**
de Jacques Besnard
avec
Louis de Funès, Falco Lulli,
Venantino Venantini,
Noël Roquevert

20.35 **Les enquêtes
du commissaire Maigret
L'AFFAIRE SAINT-FIACRE**
avec
Jean Richard,
Jean-Paul Zehnacker,
France Delahalle

20.30 **LA MEMOIRE
DU PEUPLE NOIR**
22.30 **LA PETITE LISE**
de Jean Grémillon
avec
Nadia Sibirskaia

21.30 **A fond la caisse
RIPTIDE**
Echec et mat
avec
Perry King, Joe Penny,
Thom Bray

14.00 **6 TONIC**
Clips
avec
Peter Gabriel à 19.00
Bryan Ferry à 22.00

20.30 **THE ROSE**
de Mark Rydell
avec
Bette Midler, Alan Bates,
Frederic Forrest,
Harry Dean Stanton

20.35 **GASPARD
MONTAGNE**
Première partie
La nuit terrible
avec
Bernard Noël, M.
Gabriel Jarrold

20.35 **Tenue de
MERCI, APO**
de Geneviève
avec
Annie Cordy, Guy
Gerard Darmon

20.35 **LE POINT DE
de Jean-Claude**
avec
Annie Girardot,
Jacques Dutronc,
Jean-Claude

20.30 **A fond la caisse
SUPERCOM**
Actes de violence
avec
Jan Michael Vincent,
Ernest Borgnine,
Jean Bruce

17.00 **SYSTÈME
Invité Nino**
19.00 **NRJ 6**
avec
Zigue-Zigue Sp

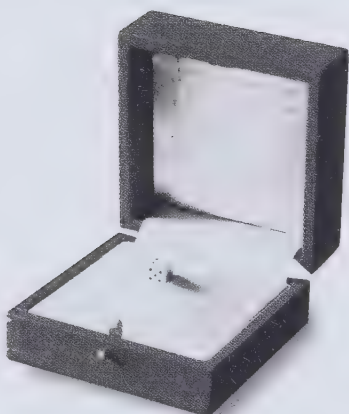
20.35 **MA VEDETTE AMÉ**
de Francis Cour
avec
Tonya Lopez,
Christian Clavier,
Martin Lamotte

Télé Star

She lived with her television. One day she fell ill, and was taken to the hospital, where she remained several months until she died on December 26, 1986. When I went to her

AR OUT	MER 20 AOUT	JEU 21 AOUT	VEN 22 AOUT
Série télévisée médie 1 DE LA URCINE NGRIN	20.35 Série TOUS EN BOÎTE Boes baisers, à bientôt réalisé par Charles Nèmes avec Jean-Pierre Sentier, Alain Dauray, Serge Marquand	20.30 Fiction L'HOMME À POIGNE réalisé par Wolfgang Staudte cinquième épisode avec Gustav Knuth	20.35 Série MICHEL BOUJENAH À L'OLYMPIA réalisation d'Alain Natum
Cinéma LES ARMES meau c fond, pardieu, neuve, olabru	20.35 Variétés LE GRAND ÉCHIQUIER Raymond Devos ou l'éloge de la folie avec Jacques Weber, Jane Birkin, Michel Legrand, Georges Brassens	20.35 Cinéma LES VIEUX DE LA VIEILLE de Gilles Grangier avec Jean Gabin, Pierre Fresnay, Noël-Noël	20.35 Série LE PRIVÉ Le festin aux pieds nus 22.55 Cinéma LA MÉMOIRE COURTE d'Eduardo De Gregorio avec Nathalie Baye
Cinéma NGERS Desagnot c stantin, rger, ateos, eyer	20.30 Variétés GALA MUSIC AWARDS Première partie présentée par Nagui et Jeanne Manson avec Cock Robin, Simply Red, King	20.30 Cinéma LA PEAU DOUCE de François Truffaut avec Jean Desailly, Françoise Dorléac, Nelly Beneditti, Daniel Ceccaldi	20.30 Fiction CELEBRITY réalisé par Paul Wendkos Quatrième épisode avec Michael Beck, Joseph Bottomo, Ben Masters
Série caisson DO blanc c ethhoff, uthore, Pherson	19.40 Série STAR TREK Suite mythologique 20.30 Football TROPHÉE JOAO SAMPER En direct du stade Neu Camp à Barcelone	20.30 Série A fond la cuisine CHIPS Explosif desgareux avec Larry Wilcox, Erik Estrada, Robert Pine	20.30 Série A fond la cuisine N 2000 Vivre en paix avec David Hasselhoff, Edward Mulhare, Rebecca Holden
Magazine musical IE & Loeb Musique IC	17.00 Magazine musical SYSTÈME 6 Invité Francis Lalonde 19.00 Musique NRJ 6 avec Jean-Michel Jarre	17.00 Magazine musical SYSTÈME 6 Invitée Lio 22.00 Portrait PROFIL 6 avec Madonna	17.00 Magazine musical SYSTÈME 6 Invité Michel Boujenah 19.00 Musique NRJ 6 avec Secret Service
Cinéma EL Kramer Jain, oral, stringer, strup	21.00 Cinéma ÊTES-VOUS FIANCÉ A UN MARIN GREC OU A UN PILOTE DE LIGNE ? de Jean Aurel avec Jean Yanne, Françoise Fabian	20.35 Cinéma STRICTEMENT PERSONNEL de Pierre Jolivet avec Pierre Ardin, Jacques Penot, Caroline Chaniolleau, Jean Reno	21.00 Cinéma Cycle Martine Carol MATHALIE de Christian-Jaque avec Martine Carol, Michel Piccoli, Philippe Clay

house to find a memento of her, I chose the TV Guide that was still on a table by the television: her last issue of *Télé Star*. For my grandmother and her home, life had stopped the week of the 16th to the 22nd of August, 1986.



The Dice

I have always liked others to make decisions for me. B. and I played a game: on even-numbered days he made the decisions, on odd-numbered days I did. When he left for the States he gave me a die to replace him.

The Dice (next part)

One day, during an opening, a young man approached me and introduced himself. He had the same last name as B. I expressed my surprise at the similarity between the uncommon spelling of his name and that of my lover. His response was gallant: two men with identical names loved me. The next day, he invited me to share his bed. I entrusted my decision to the die. Through the intermediary of his gift, B. was approving his successor.



The Gift

I was in love with him, but he had decided to leave me. To soften the breakup, he suggested a farewell trip of one week in Seville. I liked the idea though it seemed painful. So,



I accepted and we went. On the last day, seeing my tears, H. told me a secret. It was a terrible secret, which had poisoned his life. And he was confiding it to me. Only to me. At the very moment he was depriving me of his love, this man offered me, through his confession, the ultimate proof of our intimacy.



The Sheet

My great aunt was named Valentine. She was born the 4th of February 1888. At the age of ninety-six she grew tired of living. But she had set herself a goal: to live to be a hundred. Just before her hundredth birthday, while unconscious and near death in her bed, she momentarily revived and murmured: "How many days left?" There were six days left. "I'll last," she whispered, "I'll last." She died the 4th of February 1988. For her epitaph she had chosen a verse from the Bible: "She hath done what she could." Not long before her death, she had embroidered a sheet with my initials. I gave it to my friend Hervé, who was seriously ill, in memory of that night long ago when he had refused to share my bed. It was my way of inviting him to sleep a little with me. And then, I also liked thinking, that, having been embroidered by a woman who lived to be a hundred by sheer tenacity of will, this sheet, imbued with her faith, would give him her strength.

969406

Aigues-Vives (30) – Paris
M Robert CALLE ;
Mlle Sophie CALLE ;
Mme Colette CALLE ;
M et Mme Jean-Charles MAU-
RIN et leurs enfants ,
M. et Mme Serge VERA et leurs
enfants,
font part du décès de

Mlle Valentine SOUNAY
née le 4 février 1888
survenu le 4 février 1988

Les obsèques auront lieu ce ven-
dredi 5 février 1988, à 11 h, au
temple d'Aigues-Vives
"Elle a fait ce qu'elle a pu"
Saint-Marc, chapitre 14, verset 8

TORERO

Torero

The surgeon's report said, "His heart was split in two, like a book." Decorum dictated that I stay away from his funeral. His ashes were scattered, and with them my grief. I made him an ephemeral memorial, a marble plate resting on the sand of the bullring of Seville, on the spot where he died, May 1, 1992, at 6.45 p.m. in the afternoon, his heart impaled on a horn.



The Breasts

I was a flat-chested teenager. Still, wanting to be like my friends, I bought a bra, a *soutien-gorge* which, of course, I didn't need. My mother, who possessed a magnificent bosom and a sharp wit, called it my "soutien-rien"—my support-nothing. I can still hear her words today. Over the years that followed my chest slowly



pushed out. Nothing to write home about, though. Suddenly, in 1992, a transformation occurred. In the space of six months, spontaneously, I had proper tits: no treatments, no operations. A miracle. I swear. I was thrilled, but not really surprised. I put this feat down to twenty years of frustration, envy, dreams and sighs.



The Coffee Cup

He was the most intelligent man I had ever known. One day he called to invite me to lunch, and proposed we meet the following week. Somehow the idea of the pleasure I would have from listening to him was countered by a malaise: The fear of not *being up to it*. So, to ready myself I asked him what we would talk about. It was an exercise that I knew was as silly as it was vain, but one that would comfort me. D. chose a theme instantly: What makes you get up in the morning ? I prepared myself all week, accumulating all kinds of answers. When the day came, I asked him for his opinion on the matter, and he said: "The smell of coffee." That was it. Then we changed the subject. At the end of the meal, after the coffee was served, I stole a cup as a memory of our lunch together.

The Husband

10 short stories

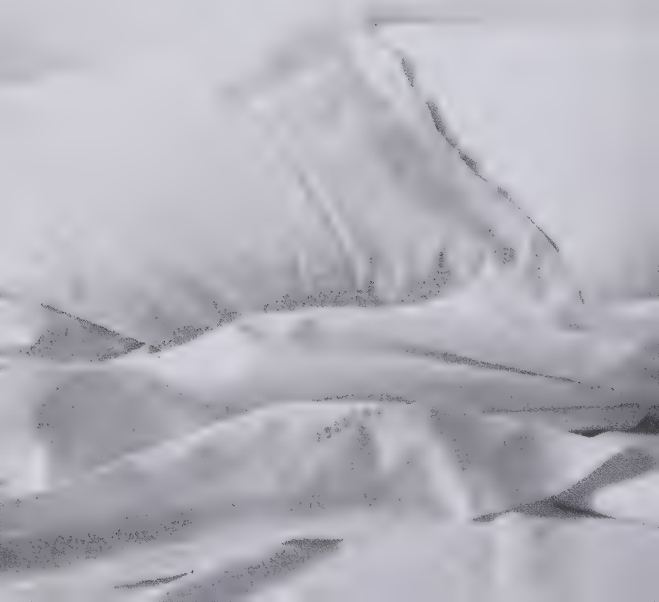
Resolution
for
the New Year

No Lying

No Biting

The Resolution

I met him in a bar in December 1989. I was in New York for a couple of days. He offered to let me stay in his apartment and I accepted. He gave me the address, handed me the keys, and disappeared. I spent the night alone in his bed. The only thing I learned about him came from a piece of paper that I found under a cigarette box. It said: "Resolutions for the New Year: no lying, no biting." Later, I called him from Paris to thank him. We decided to meet and made a date for January 20, 1990. Orly airport at 9:00 a.m. He never arrived, never called, and did not answer his phone. On January 10, 1991, at 7:00 p.m., I received the following call: "It's Greg Shephard. I am at Orly airport, one year late. Would you like to see me?" This man knew how to talk to me.



II

The Hostage

He was an unreliable man. For our first date he showed up one year late. Therefore, when he left, to make sure he would come back, I insisted that he leave something with me as a hostage. A week later, he sent me his most precious possession: a small French nineteenth-century painting, entitled *The Love Letter*, which portrayed a young girl who bore an uncanny likeness to me. A year passed, and on January 18, 1992, after having rented two rings and a witness, I became his bride in a simple ceremony held at a 24-hour drive-up wedding window on Route 604 in Las Vegas. Later he gave me *The Love Letter* as a wedding gift. I had acquired a husband but in the process had lost my guarantee that he would always come back to me.



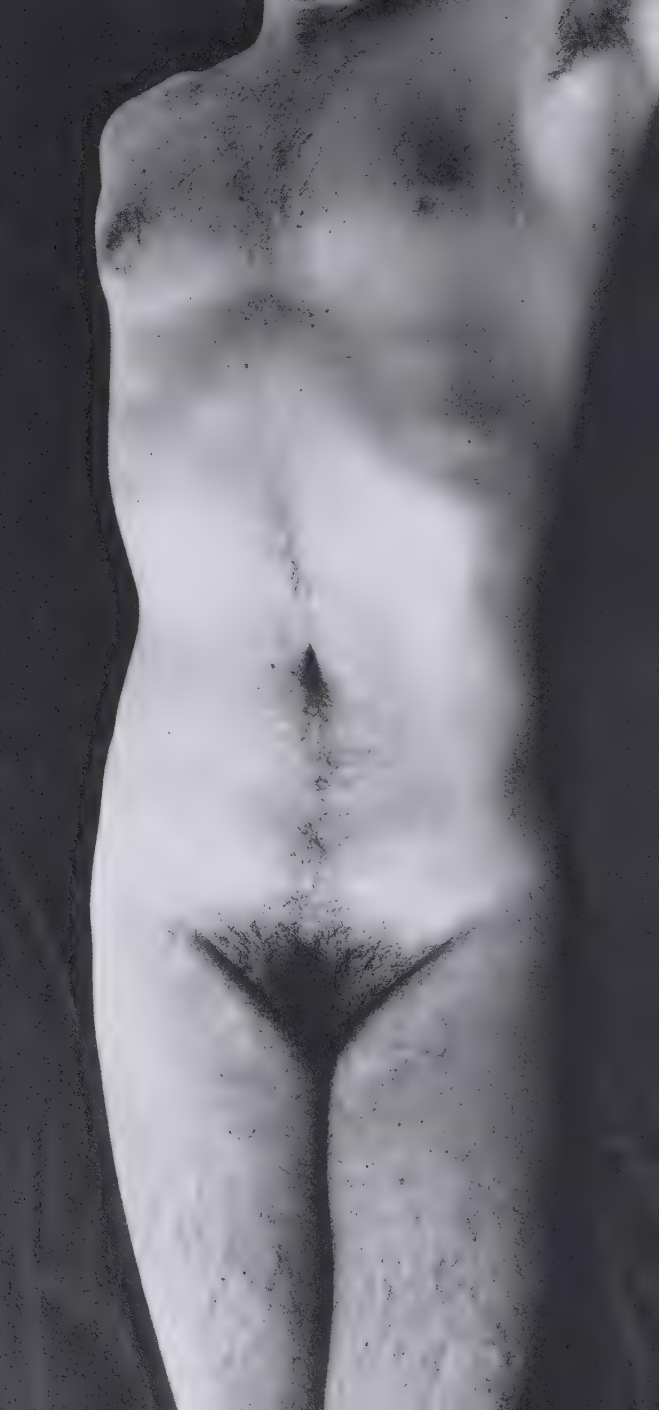
III

The Argument

Tuesday, March 10, 1992, at 11:50 a.m., he threw the following in my direction: an empty tea kettle, a butcher's block, a yellow love seat, four pillows, a biography of Bruce Nauman



and a black phone. When the phone hit the wall, I understood it would be preferable to meet his request and listen. By 1:00 p.m., everything was back in order except for a hole left in the wall. I hid this last bit of evidence with our wedding picture.



IV

Amnesia

No matter how hard I try, I never remember the color of a man's eyes or the shape and size of his sex. But I decided that a wife should know these things. So I made an effort to fight this amnesia. I now know he has green eyes.



V

The Erection

We drove across America. Every morning, contemplating the bed we slept in, I would whisper the same refrain: "NO sex last night." This went on for fifteen days



until we arrived in Las Vegas. There I persuaded him to marry me. That night, the NO became a YES. Later he confessed that his desire sprang from the fact I was now his wife. An erection was the first thing marriage had given me.

~~1/4~~ S.

fri 1230 a.m.

You're a phone number by a photo I have listed
in my head. ~~both are memories addressed to you.~~
you ~~are always for me~~ a destination ~~A place to~~
~~reach for every night.~~ ~~You are~~ a dream ~~that~~ sat
down next to me. ~~I feel like~~ a fragment on this
page. cut off from, ~~everything~~, and lost at the end
of the line. looking for the right words ~~to reach~~
~~to reach~~ a mark between here and you. I'm a
row of empty seats filled with strangers crowdin
my head with their careful forecasts and concerns
. A smile from you would drive them away, or, on
of those falls you sometimes take into my eyes.
that would be enough.

You asked me ~~once~~ if I believed in love at first
sight Away to Find you Did I ever ~~answer you~~ /

i

My ^d feelings typewriter is blinkin
green on line again.

my ^{of} confession is ~~now~~ last night I kissed the
envelope with your letter and photo

VI

The Rival

I wanted a love letter, but he would not write one to me. One day, I saw the word “Sophie” written at the top of a piece of stationery. This gave me hope. Two months after our wedding, I noticed the edge of a piece of paper sticking out from under his typewriter. I pulled it toward me. The last line of the letter appeared: “My confession is that, last night I kissed the envelope with your letter and photo.” I continued to read, in reverse: “You asked me once if I believed in love at first sight. Did I ever answer you?” At the top of the page I noticed these words were not addressed to me but to a letter “H.” I crossed out the “H” and replaced it with an “S.” This became the letter I had never received.



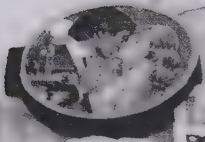
VII

The Fake Marriage

Our improvised roadside marriage in Las Vegas didn't allow me the chance to fulfill the secret dream that I share with so many women: to one day wear a wedding dress. So, on Saturday, June 20, 1992, I decided to bring



family and friends together on the steps of a church in Paris for a formal wedding picture. The photograph was followed by a mock civil ceremony performed by a real mayor and then a reception. The rice, the wedding cake, the white veil—nothing was missing. I crowned, with a fake marriage, the truest story of my life.



EXPRES

Anything

EXPRES



not really
is only
Here it is
paving
at last
show
like it
was
in the
should be
it 5 minutes
unleash
the
unleash
- New

Biggie



VIII

The Breakup

He dreamed of making movies. I dreamed of crossing America with him. To get him to follow me, I suggested that during the trip we make a film about our life together. He agreed, and on January 3, 1992, we left New York in his silver Cadillac and headed for California. Nine months later in San Francisco, we hadn't yet written the words "THE END" on our movie, when one day, I reached with my hand under the car seat to slide it forward, and came across a black plastic bag. I opened it. It contained letters, 24 to be exact, in Greg's handwriting, all addressed to a certain H., and sent—as the postmarks showed—during the course of 1992. I didn't know why but they were back in his possession, and he had chosen to hide them there. I read them all, and stole two. One, because in it he said: "I'll be free in October." The other, for this phrase: "... with Sophie, I have this 'baby' that wouldn't have existed if I hadn't so much passion for you ..."

I had given Greg the chance to fulfill his deepest desire, and here he was thanking another woman. A few days later he handed me a letter: "Sophie, I always knew you would come into my life. I want you also to know that I love you, and that you became the most precious thing to me." Doubting this, I decided to prove his letter right: he would be free in October.



IX

The Divorce

In my fantasies, I am a man. Greg was quick to notice this. Perhaps that's why he invited me one day to piss for him. It became a ritual: I would come up behind him, blindly undo his pants, take out his penis, and do my best to aim well. Then, after the customary shake, I would nonchalantly put it back and close his fly. Shortly after our separation, I asked Greg for a photo-souvenir of this ritual. He accepted. So, in a Brooklyn studio, I had him pee into a plastic bucket in front of a camera. This photograph was an excuse to put my hand on his sex one last time. That evening, I agreed to the divorce.



X

The Other

There was a man I liked, but the first time we made love I was afraid to look at him. I thought I was still in love with Greg, and feared being overwhelmed by the idea that the man in my bed wasn't the right one. So, I chose to close my eyes: In the dark, at least the uncertainty remained. One day I made the mistake of telling him why I kept my eyes closed in bed. He said nothing. Several months later, finally free of the ghost of Greg, and my doubts, I opened my eyes, now certain that he was the one I wanted to see. I didn't know that it would be our last night together. He was about to leave me. "What happens is always so far ahead of us, that we can never catch up to it and know its true appearance."



Dream Wedding

I nearly got married to a man who had been posted to China for three years. That's a long time. Like a fiancée whose betrothed is bound for the front, I wanted to marry him on the runway at Roissy airport, just before he left. The groom would step up into the plane as I stood on the tarmac. The reception would be held without him and I would spend my wedding night alone. We set the date for October 7, 2000. Negotiations with the



airport authorities, mayor's agreement to officiate, license, guest list, dress—everything was ready. Until a letter from the state prosecutor arrived refusing permission. Weddings had to be celebrated on municipal premises, with two exceptions: hospital, in the likelihood of imminent death of one of the betrothed, or prison. So, town hall, jail, agony, these were our choices. Banal, radical or tragic. Still, on October 7, I did go to the airport to wear my dress, just once, and to grieve for our wedding. And I did go back home alone, as planned.

T.

Etes-Vous
Triste ?

Etes-Vous
Triste ?

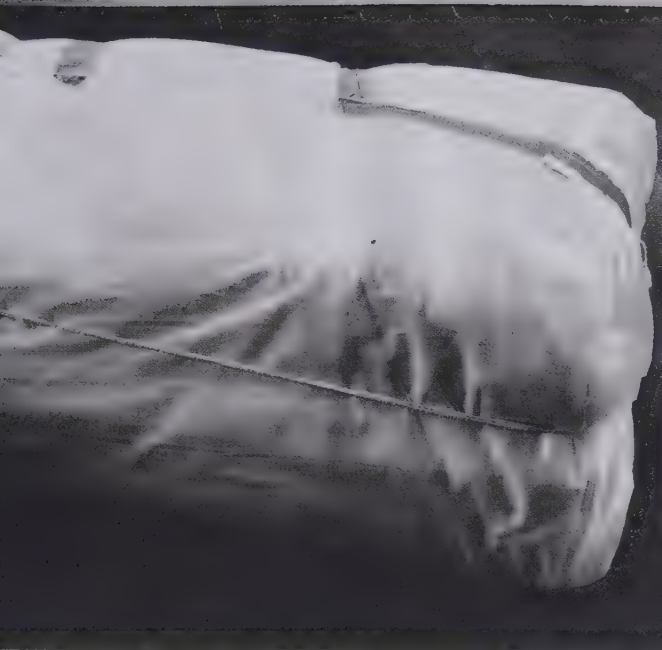
The Medical Examination

I underwent a medical examination. I had to fill out a six-page questionnaire of nearly 300 questions. To all except one, I answered NO. Have you contracted rubella, variola, cholera, chickenpox, tetanus, tuberculosis, yellow fever, scarlet fever or typhoid? Do you suffer from a heart murmur, high cholesterol, hypertension, diabetes? Are you prone to vertigo? Do you have headaches, stomachaches, palpitations, nausea, children, allergies, strokes, kidney stones, dizzy spells, epileptic seizures, lower back pain, gastro-intestinal disorders, inflamed gums, hearing troubles, blurred vision? And suddenly, out of nowhere, lost amidst this sea of questions, the following one: "Are you sad?"



Journey to California

A man wrote to me from California: "June 4, 1999. Dear Ms. Calle, I have recently been released from a long-term relationship. I have been wading my way through various moods and emotions as a result of this separation. I would like to spend the remainder of my mourning/grieving period in your bed ..." How to say yes? Tricky. Considering how far he'd have to travel, would it be fair to send him packing if I found him unattractive? And besides, there was already a man in my bed. Two months later, my bed



boarded the plane for San Francisco. The carrier delivered 1 bedstead, 1 box spring, 1 mattress, the sheets I had slept in, 2 pillows, 2 pillowcases and 1 blanket. I wished the recipient a quick recovery and urged him to keep me posted about his convalescence so I could reclaim my property once he had fully recovered. He acknowledged receipt of these items on August 4: "Your bed is very comfortable. I find the scent on the pillows and linen to be soothing. I will keep you abreast of my emotions and experiences ..."

In September, I heard that his pain had eased. On February 2, 2000, my bed was back home.



Room with a View

Some nights you can't put into words. I spent the night of October 5, 2002 in a room set up for me at the top of the Eiffel Tower. In bed. Between white sheets, listening to the strangers who took turns at my bedside. *Tell me a story so I won't fall asleep. Maximum length: 5 minutes. Longer if thrilling. No story, no visit. If your story sends me to sleep, please leave quietly and ask the guard to wake me ...* Hundreds turned up. Some nights you can't describe. I came back down in the early morning. A message was flashing on each pillar: *sophie calle, end of sleepless night, 7:00 a.m.* As if to confirm that I hadn't dreamt it all. I asked for the moon and I got it: I SLEPT AT THE TOP OF THE EIFFEL TOWER. Since then, I keep an eye out for it, and if I glimpse it along some street, I say hello. Give it a fond look. Up there, 1,014 feet above ground, it's a bit like home.



Renée de face

My father received a Protestant upbringing. To hide his emotions, he covers his mouth, because he can't hide his eyes. My father is a collector. His first purchase was *Renée de Face*, an etching by Jacques Villon. Later he sold it and regretted it. He spent years trying to find it, to no avail. Not so long ago I was leaving the Salon du Livre Ancien. I turned around and there she was: *Renée de Face*. I called my father to ask if he still wanted her. He couldn't make up his mind: perhaps she wasn't really that beautiful after all? Wasn't it better to just let memories be? I bought it, and that very evening I secretly hung it in his bedroom. When he saw it he did not say thank you, he exclaimed: "How much did you pay for it?" He was moved and he had received a Protestant upbringing.



D 982

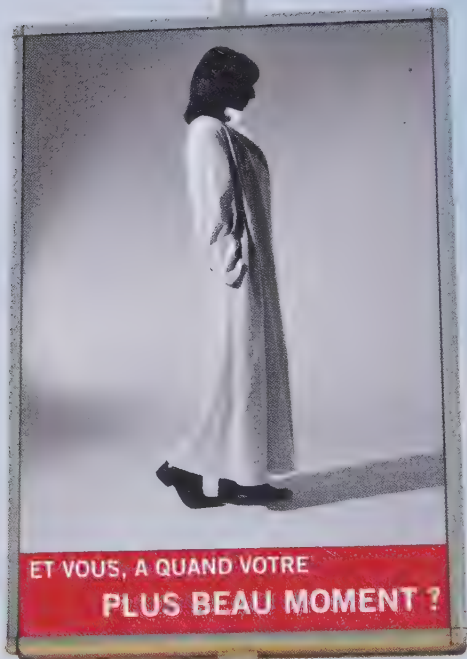
~~LE TRAIT~~

V.A.N.
JUM E
DUC A
ROUEN

Counterproductive

Counterproductive: bringing about effects or results regarded as contrary to those intended.

After seven years of living together, P. phoned to say he was leaving me. I asked him to come and tell me in person. He said it would be “counterproductive.” A word that was open to interpretation—P. intended to leave me, I intended the opposite—but effective. In order to put this epilogue to good use, I decided that I was going to be “productive.” My mother had given me a book called *How to Find a Man in Paris*. I would follow its instructions to the letter. I also had this idea of asking couples I envied—provided I found some—to tell me the exact circumstances of their first meeting. Then I would go at that same place, at the same time, on the same day of the week, the same month, and wait ... But the pain went away before I’d had time to try anything.



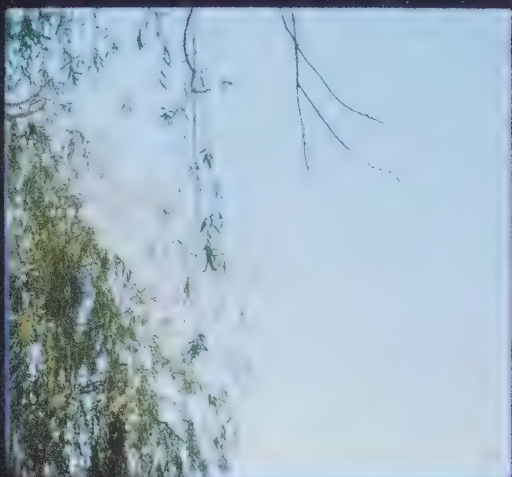
To Victor Hasselblad

I never wanted children. Imagine a sad day:
I'm feeling lonely and dreading nightfall.
Here comes a young couple, the man with his
arm around the woman's waist, the woman
pushing a stroller. Their eyes tell me to give
way: An offspring bestows certain rights.
They gaze blissfully at the baby. And I sigh:
"Poor things ...". Not a reasonable reaction,
I know, but I feel better already.



Wait for me

I was two. It happened on a beach—Deauville, I think. My mother had entrusted me to a group of children. I was the youngest and they had to get rid of me: that was their game. They huddled together, whispering, then burst out laughing and scattered when I tried to come near. And I ran after them, shouting: “Wait for me! Wait for me!” I can still remember.



The View of my Life

My bedroom window gives on to a pasture. In the pasture there are bulls, and with the bulls, tick birds. On the left, the branches of a weeping willow. In the distance, a row of ash and tamarisk trees. There are egrets and the occasional stork. Nothing remarkable, and yet, this grassland glows. I couldn't begin to count the hours I've spent looking out at it, through the mosquito net. This meadow, framed by the window, is the image that my eyes have photographed more than any other. It is the view of my life.



The Hairdryer

A group of people are asked to describe a painting of a reclining woman. Most men see her as sad or abandoned. Women, on the other hand, see her as serene, even languid. My father deviates from the norm. Yesterday



we went to the theater. At the end of the play, the female protagonist sinks into a depression and electrocutes herself in her bath with a hairdryer. Her head rests on the edge of the tub. The curtain comes down. My father considers this a happy ending. He sees a woman relaxing, finally at peace.

Monique



Silence.

Every time my mother passed by the Bristol Hotel, she stopped, crossed herself, and told us to shut up. “Silence!” she said, “This is where I lost my virginity.”



You really fooled them!

I once had a show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. My mother came to the opening. When she discovered my works hanging among those of Hopper and Magritte, she was amazed. With no malice whatsoever, she cried out: “You really fooled them!”

•



Obituary

Monique wanted to see the sea one last time. On Tuesday, January 31, we went to Cabourg. The last journey. The next day, “so my feet look nice when I go”: the last pedicure. She read *Ravel* by Jean Echenoz. The last book. A man she had long admired but never met came to her bedside. Making a friend for the last time. She organized the funeral ceremony: her last party. Final preparations: she chose her funeral dress—navy blue with a white pattern—a photograph showing her making a face for the tombstone, and her epitaph: *I’m getting bored already!* She wrote a last poem, for her burial. She chose Montparnasse cemetery as her final address. She didn’t want to die. She said this was the first time in her life she didn’t mind waiting. She shed her last tears. The days before her death, she kept repeating: “It’s odd. It’s so stupid.” She listened to the Clarinet Concerto in A major, K. 622. For the last time. Her last wish: to leave with the music of Mozart in her ears. Her last request: for us not to worry. “Ne vous faites pas de souci.” *Souci* was her last word. On March 15, 2006, at 3:00 p.m., the last smile. The last breath, somewhere between 3:02 and 3:13. Impossible to capture.



Dead in a good mood

Read in my mother's diary:

December 28, 1985 – No use investing in the tenderness of my children, between Antoine's placid indifference and Sophie's selfish arrogance! My only consolation is, she is so morbid that she will come visit me in my grave more often than on Rue Boulard.

May 29, 1986 – I don't remember to whom I said yesterday over the phone, about myself: "She came from nothing—and left jaded about everything!"

September 9, 1986 – I still don't know whether I want to be cremated or buried. Funny how I can't imagine that happening to me at all!

April 28, 1987 – Good-bye, Diary! I'm off to New York. Let's hope it will all be wonderful. If the plane crashes, here's a cheery farewell to life!

November 10, 1988 – I slowly get used to my depression; slighted, it slowly backs away.

June 6, 1989 – Abominable.

January 1, 1990 – "To have accomplished nothing and to die overworked." (Cioran)

April 1, 1990 – No, I'm not depressed, nor bitter, but I am terribly bored, without purpose or project or vision, "I feel that I am just a ruined tomb in which my virtues and illusions lie."

February 21, 1995 – Nothing! Except nursing my sorrow.

December 11, 1995 – I would already like Christmas to be over. Or perhaps I'd like my life to be over.

December 10, 1996 – Dear Diary (possibly the last volume thereof), good-bye. I didn't give you much, and you returned the compliment...

One of the notebooks was undated and the pages were blank, except for a few notes about how to use the VCR, and this sentence: "I died in a very good mood."



Today my mother died

On December 27, 1986, my mother wrote in her diary: “My mother died today.”

On March 15, 2006, in turn, I wrote in mine: “My mother died today.”

No one will say this about me.

The end.



The Giraffe

When my mother died I bought a taxidermied giraffe. I named it after my mother and hung it up in my studio. Monique looks down at me with sadness and irony.

Souris .
(Mouse)



Souris

Fabio kissed him. Camille whispered her song, *She Was*, into his ear. Florence stroked him. Anne put him to sleep. He died. Maurice dug a hole in the garden. I laid Souris in a little white model coffin, the kind traveling sales reps would use before the advent of photography. Too small. His back paws were sticking out. Yves buried him. Serena planted daffodils around his grave.

I received a message on my phone: *Sophie, I am sorry about your cat. Could you ask Camille to pick up some vegetables maybe leeks or turnips if she sees any? Kisses.*



The ghost of Souris

Dear Sophie, I recently heard about the deaths of your cat and your father, and I just wanted to let you know I was thinking about you. M.

Souris is the name that I will have repeated most often in my life. I still catch myself whispering it at night. His preferred territory was the space between my two pillows. There, in that void, that stillness where he used to breathe, I feel his absence most keenly. After our fathers die, we don't sleep with their ghosts in our beds.

Bob ^a



Morning

Each night, after leaving his hospital room, I would write down what might be my father's last word.

There was: elsewhere, homosexual, money.

Whispered: I can't go on.

Who's there? Glass of wine. Cypress.

That week, on Monday, he said: Screwed.

Tuesday: Daughter. "This is my daughter."

Something I'll never hear again.

Wednesday, with a movement of his lips and eyes, he asked for a kiss. My father, who never kissed me, wanted a kiss. Could this very uncharacteristic gesture be his last word?

Thursday: Toilets. Not a great word. He would be alive tomorrow, for sure.

Friday: Paintings. "We're going to rehang the paintings."

A beautiful last word. A dangerous one. I was torn between wanting a perfect final word, and hoping for a bad word, a word that could not be the last, one that would reassure me that my father would be alive tomorrow.

Saturday, he said: Dying.

Sunday, he said: Morning.

He died on Monday April 6, 2015, at 6.50 am.

My father was ninety-four years old.

Not long before, when I asked him how he was doing, he responded:

"I'm not making any progress."



Silent Heart Attack

When my father fell ill, I too fell ill. I got shingles and had a heart attack. As if I wanted my father, a doctor, to take care of his daughter one last time. Or as though I were accompanying him on his way, wedding myself to his illness, while at the same time, through this irreproachable excuse, avoiding the sight of him in his diminished state.

To reiterate. Shingles: weakened immune system. Heart attack: death of a part of the heart.

Unlike the usual heart attack, mine was 'silent'.

Was the imminent loss of those eyes that had guided my life threatening me with silence?



Who r u

Who r' u

Delete contact. Difficult.

When my father died, I didn't erase his number from my phone.

Yesterday I dialed it by mistake and hung up right away.

A few minutes later, his picture and name came up on the screen.

Bob was sending me a message.



My mother, my cat, my father

My parents each took three months to die. Three months: time for the last gestures of love, time to become an orphan. But not the endless, grinding time of agony and despair, of seeing my flamboyant mother and my impeccable father fall from their heights.

A week before she died, my mother refused to see an unwelcome visitor: "Tell him I'm dead!" On the Tuesday before he died, my father complained: "I'd like to go to that new place. We're losing time. Let's set a date, we keep delaying, delaying!" They died just in time, both of them: alive to the end.

I forgot to cut a lock of their hair, and that's not like me. When my cat died, I saved a tuft of his fur. Florence was relieved: "I'm glad to see that you still distinguish between humans and animals."

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