

Dear M ---

It will be our twenty-second wedding anniversary in 14 days, on the exact day Julius Caesar was assassinated 2057 years ago. Did I know when I cheekily set the day – certainly without you really realizing the significance of the phrase, which I thought was hilarious, ‘Beware the Ides of March’ – that there was at its foundation a hint of betrayal even in our relationship – did I know it in my bones? It’s a strange transgression, made sharper by the 22 years it took you to be bold enough to disclose it. And of course it’s dull. And unimportant. You were both drunk. It meant nothing. We weren’t married yet. You were twenty-six and full – to the brim, no doubt – of burbling, yearnful spermatozoa. I know it’s nice for you to have it off your chest, another cliché. I want you to know how big I’m trying to be about it, how rational because I suppose that’s obvious that I should be. I’m sure I asked you over the years if you’d ever cheated – I’m not a really truly trusting person – and now I realize our borders for this thing we’ve shared these long years – since 1988 in my mind – only started for you with a contract, with a legal, bureaucratic, \$52.30 administration fee (at City Hall). You’d never cheated on our marriage. It’s so disorganising to realise how very different we are in this regard.

Yesterday I thought about the fleshiness of the cheat. That it was animal doesn’t surprise me. I’ve always been attracted by your body, the smell and muscle of it, and it occurred to me that our meeting place is bodily, and in the places/moments where the mind and body meet. I was disappointed at first and then yesterday furious – furious enough to consider writing this letter, but today I’m sad. Actually I’m heartbroken. It’s as if every moment – well, every crucial moment – the orgasms, the fights, the tenderness, the morning tea in bed – is in a way a kind of offering in compensation, an appeasement or atonement to this awful shitty thing you admit to having done. It’s easy to forgive, they say. I wish I could not know this thing. It’s brought into question so much. I suppose it’s a kind of love that stopped you from telling me, and I should take solace there. But inside that is your guilt and fear which feels like a violence on our relationship and even toward our children because whatever you say, these things are held in the body, especially in the body.

Anyway, and deeply,

Love,
Kathryn^{1,2}

p.s. I wonder if you say I’m sorry if it will help things. You’ve haven’t said it, you know.

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¹ Kathryn Kuitenbrouwer is the author of two novels, *The Nettle Spinner* and *Perfecting*, and a short story collection, *Way Up*. Her recent short fiction has been published in *Granta*, *The Walrus*, and *Storyville*. *All The Broken Things*, a novel, will be published in early 2014 by Random House Canada. We asked Kathryn whether this letter was a work of fiction or memoir; she replied enigmatically, and we felt sullied by the asking.

² When we asked Kathryn for some background notes about letter-writing in general and this letter in particular, she offered us this:
 'When I lived in Ghent, Belgium between 1988 and 1992, I wrote many letters. I loved going to the impossibly grand post office in the Korenmarkt and, in broken Dutch, choosing the prettiest stamps. There were things I loved about receiving letters in Ghent. The postmen dressed in black great coats, sometimes with oiled capes. They came on bicycles, bearing—in leather satchels—gifts and hope twice a day. I was homesick and half in love with the messenger. Writing and receiving letters was therapeutic, and the postman represented the intermediary—time. In the week or so it took to get a letter home or receive one from home, everything would have changed. You could measure transformation in this way, and also have a trace of it, through the responses your letters elicited. That Post Office is a mall, now. The postmen wear ugly lightweight plastic bomber jackets. And I rarely write a letter. The strange thing about this project is that one gets to read one's own letter again, something one wouldn't normally be able to do with a real letter. In my case, this was especially odd. The letter was much less angry than I had thought it might be. It was more fair, and particular, and, if I may say so, better written. I read it just as anyone might, as a story I had come upon. I was moved by it. And then ashamed to be moved by something I had written. The narcissism!'