I stood awkwardly at the altar wondering how I ever made it down the eternal aisle. My abundant bouquet of cranberry colored roses was shaking in my grip. I watched as the other bridesmaids strolled confidently down the aisle. Gail's college friends, her cousin, her sister. They all looked so happy and so excited. Didn't they feel the threat that was forming a lump in my throat?

The music changed and I lifted my eyes to glance down the aisle. Gail stepped out into the light on her father's arm and the organist played a classical piece that just spoke of Gail. She breezed down the aisle with a look of confidence and fulfillment enlightening her face. She was incredible—so graceful, so striking in her Victorian gown. And I knew she was happy. I could feel it in her smile. We had always shared that unspoken language that allowed us to read each other's thoughts. As I felt her peacefulness, my anxiety drained away. It was replaced with a calm sense of belonging and friendship. I was standing beside my friend to hold her hand as she crossed from one life to another. I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

When the service was completed, the dancing done, and the food devoured, Gail slipped away to change her clothes. I was dancing on the almost empty dance floor in the comfort of Chris's
arms when she re-emerged in her pink going-away suit. She looked like an angel and Gerald couldn't have looked prouder if he'd had the Queen of England on his arm. We hugged goodbye as she left for her honeymoon and I watched her step into her newly discovered world of happiness.

And as I felt the warmth of Chris's arms around my waist, I knew that there really was a world of happiness somewhere.
January, 1992

Just like always, the magic didn't last long. In less than two short weeks, Christmas vacation had ended and it was time for me to return to school. I fought it with everything in me. I felt like I did when I was a baby and Mom had sent me to my room. I'm going to hold my breath until I pass out if you make me go, I thought. That's a scary place where monsters live. They're under my bed, they're at my kitchen door. Please don't make me go, Mom.

But I wasn't three years old and holding my breath didn't solve anything. So, I went. It was good to see Jessi again, but I wasn't ready to enter back into the political world of college. I had meetings to go to, charity events to co-sponsor, and papers to write. I poured myself into my school work while I made excuses for everything else. In the middle of my first week back, I decided that I couldn't play this game for another year if I wanted to maintain any of my sanity.

After counting up all of my credit hours and examining my general studies requirements, I discovered that I could graduate in July if I changed my major from English education to English. I thought about not being in a high school classroom teaching the subject that gave me so much pleasure. I considered what it would be like if I didn't have my summers to write. What would an English major offer me? Jobs in publishing, editing, and one year less in this hell. It was definitely
worth the other sacrifices. So, that same afternoon, I went to the administration office and changed my major. I was able to see the light at the end of the tunnel and nothing had ever looked so bright. I made some slight changes in my current schedule, and I began to think about graduation.

"Mom," I started when I had worked up the nerve to call her, "there's something I need to tell you."

"What's happened now?" Mom demanded with panic in her voice.

"Nothing like that," I replied with relief. "I changed my major."

"You did what?"

"I changed my major."

"Katrina, you're a senior. How can you do that?"

"Well, it's not a drastic change. I just dropped my education endorsement. I'm going to have an English major and I'll be done this summer."

"How do you feel about not teaching?"

"I'm okay with it. If I ever want to go back and get certified, I won't have that much to do. But right now, I'm just ready to get out of here."

"If you're happy with your decision, then I am, too."

The sound of relief was evident in Mom's voice. I knew she wanted me home so she could protect me from all the evils of the world.

"I love you, Mom."

"I love you, too, Katrina. Bye, Honey."
A world of worries was lifted off my shoulders in that instant. But I still had four months to go.
"Guess what Julie got?" Jessi yelled as she walked in the door one evening in February.

"What?"

"A tattoo!"

I looked up from Antony and Cleopatra.

"I've always wanted a tattoo. Where did she get it?"

"On her butt!"

I laughed. "Did she say whether or not it hurt?"

"She said it hurt like hell!" Jessi answered. She looked at me tentatively. "She gave me the number of the guy who did it."

I looked at her suspiciously. "Why?"

"Come on, Katrina, let's do it!"

"I would love to, Jess, but I have no tolerance for pain and I'm too paranoid about dirty needles."

"We can check this guy out before we go to him, and I'll be with you so it won't hurt as much."

I was really interested in Jessi's proposal. I thought back to my earlier scare with AIDS and the pain that had brought that fear about. Why should I deny myself something that I've always wanted if someone else could force that pain and that worry on me without my consent?

"Do you know anything at all about this guy?"

"He's a graphic art major here on campus, and he does this
on the side to pay for his education. So, obviously, he has a lot of clients." Jessi's voice was edged with excitement. "Let's call him right now."

"Alright," I agreed. "It can't hurt to find out about him."

Jessi dialed the number Julie had given her and talked to the tattoo artist of Ball State. She found out about the sterilizing methods he used and set up two tentative appointments for Thursday, which was two days away.

When she hung up, I picked up the phone and called the Health Center. I found out that his sterilization methods were the same ones that the doctors at the Health Center used. I was beginning to share in Jessi's excitement.

"I can't believe I'm actually considering this," I admitted. "Chris will kill me, but I don't really care. What are you going to get if we do it?"

"I don't know," Jessi said. "I want something different. Not a butterfly or a flower or anything. How about you?"

"I kind of know what I want, but I have to find my specifics. I always thought that if I got a tattoo, I'd get a Chinese symbol that said something about my personality. That way, people would wonder what it meant and I'd only tell the ones who mattered to me. I want something personal and private, not something that everyone else has."

"That's a really cool idea," Jessi agreed.

That afternoon we went to the library and found some books
on basic Chinese. We sat there all afternoon leafing through the intricate drawings.

"I found it!" I declared successfully as I marked the page that I was on.

Jessi looked at the symbol that I had marked. The definition read, "To write, to compose." It was perfect. It would be my inspirational tattoo. Writing was the thing I loved to do most in the world. I knew that I had made my decision. Jessi eventually decided on her design, too, and we drove to Jody, the tattoo artist's, house on Thursday afternoon.

We pulled into a very Beaver Cleaverish neighborhood and matched the address on our paper to a salmon colored two-story house.

"This definitely looks safe enough."

"I can't believe I'm actually doing this," I said as I realized my voice was shaking.

A heavy set heavily tattooed student met us at the door.

"I'm Jody," he said as he showed us inside. "I'm glad you guys decided to go through with it." We followed him upstairs and he led us to his "office." It consisted of a copy machine, a reclining chair, a desk full of ominous looking utensils, and posters of very detailed creatures all over the walls.

We showed Jody the pictures that we had selected. He copied them on his copy machine and adjusted the sizes of the pictures until we were satisfied.
Jessi and I had decided earlier that I had to go first or I'd chicken out before it was my turn. So, true to our plan, I hopped onto the chair and let Jody trace my Chinese symbol onto my right thigh. I had decided on that spot for some very practical reasons. I wanted to be able to hide my tattoo for interviews and executive-type meetings, but I wanted it to be seen sometimes, too. I also thought that it would hurt less on my leg.

I was wrong. The minute those tiny vibrating needles pierced my skin, I thought I was going to die right there in the chair. Every time his machine whirred to a start, I gripped the arms of the chair with a strength that I never knew I had. Tiny beads of sweat were rolling down my face and down my back. Mistakenly, I looked as Jody wiped the excess blood and ink from my leg.

"Does it hurt really badly?" Jessi asked.

"No, not really," I lied through clenched teeth. "You kind of get used to it." I couldn't say anything else because those needles were taking my breath away.

In less than a half hour it was over. I looked down and my swollen red leg and I knew I had no regrets. My destiny was now a permanent part of my body. To write, to compose. I knew it was what I had to do to free myself from my inner prison. The pain and the fear had been worth it. I had made myself different, unique. And this time the choice had been mine.
Toward the end of February, I took it upon myself to go back on Prozac. I was feeling very lost without it. Some days were wonderful and some days were endless. I couldn't find a happy medium and it was making me crazy. I was tired of having my own screams wake me up in the middle of the night. It was time to hide again, time to find some solace in a man-made drug.

"Do you think it's safe to put yourself back on Prozac?" Chris asked me over the phone. "Maybe you should talk to Jimmy first."

"He doesn't think I should be on it at all," I defended. "He told me when I started that it was non-addictive. I don't see why it would be a problem."

"If you think that it will help, then, I guess I'd do it, too. I just wish there was something I could do. I feel so helpless sometimes."

"There is something you can do, Chris. Talk to me. Stop acting like I've committed some horrible unspeakable crime. I need someone to talk to sometimes and I'm afraid to come to you because you won't tell me how you feel."

"Katrina, I don't know what to say to you. I'm no psychiatrist. What if I say the wrong things?"

"I don't need a psychiatrist, Chris! I need you! I need you to accept me, to love me, to tell me what you're feeling."
I'm tired of this wall that's built between us."

"I didn't put the wall up, Katrina, you did. You won't even let me touch you anymore."

I felt my blood begin to warm.

"Don't start this with me, Chris," I warned. "I can't help it that I'm scared to have you touch me. You just have to understand that it's not you, it's him."

"Well, you're letting him control everything that used to belong to us!" Chris's voice was full of desperation, but mine was full of anger.

"If all you care about is our physical relationship, then to hell with you! I don't need you to sleep with me, I need you to talk to me. I need you to be able to laugh with me again. Stop pressuring me, Chris, because you're driving me away!"

"That's not what I meant, Katrina. You're what matters to me. I don't care about what happens between us physically. I know that's going to take some time. I don't mean to pressure you. I just get so frustrated because you always seem to shut me out."

"I shut you out because you shut me out," I pleaded. "I really need to know how you're feeling, Chris. You've never once told me that you're angry over what happened to me. Are you angry?"

"How can you even ask me that question, Katrina? Of course I'm angry. What good does it do you if I'm angry, though? I could hunt this son of a bitch down and kill him, but what
good would that do you? I want to help you heal, I don't want
to bring back the bad memories."

"Maybe I need to have them brought back once in a while
so I can deal with them, Chris. I do need to hear that you're
angry. Sometimes I want you to go out and kill him. I need
to know that you feel the same way. Just let me in, please."

I was crying openly now.
"Can I come over?"
"I'd like that."
"I love you, Katrina."

Jessi was at another one of her meetings, so I cried alone
on the couch.

When Chris knocked on the door, I ran to greet him as
quickly as I could. I stopped short, though, when I noticed
the small piece of paper folded up on the floor. It was still
partly stuck under the door, like someone couldn't quite push
it all the way through because of the carpet.

"Open the door, Katrina," Chris said from the hallway.
I unfolded the note and read the scratchy handwriting.
"I'm watching you."

My legs gave way and I slumped to the floor. It was
happening again. It was happening again. My body began to
shake uncontrollably as Chris pounded on the door.

"Let me in, Katrina. I can hear you right there. What's
wrong? Please let me in--you're scaring me."

I somehow managed to unlock the door and Chris grabbed
the wrinkled piece of paper from my hand.

"God damn it!" he screamed. "God damn you!" he yelled into the black hallway. Then he gathered me in his arms.

"It's okay, Baby, no one's going to hurt you. I'm here."

I sat stiffly in his grip without response as his words of comfort reverberated meaninglessly through my head.
February 23, 1992
Sunday

Dear Karen,

How are you? It's been a while since I've talked to you, so I thought I'd write and let you know how things are going. I changed my major so I'm going to graduate in July. It's pretty exciting for me. I know I made the right decision. I'll have a straight English major, but hopefully I'll be able to find a job in some kind of publishing or editing. Keep your fingers crossed.

Chris is good. In fact, he's been wonderful. He's so understanding. Sometimes I get so angry with him because he doesn't know how to talk to me or what to say to me, but I guess maybe I expect too much from him. He's always there for me and it's wonderful to have that kind of security. I can call him up at any hour of the day or night and he's there. I think he's really scared for me, but I sometimes wish he'd admit it. We talked about marriage the other day. Of course, it wouldn't be for awhile, but we talked anyway. Is it normal to have a marriage without sex? Hopefully by then I'll have grown out of this dysfunctional stage.

My mom has been having some health problems lately, but other than that, my family is good. I still can't talk to them about what happened, but it's always there, hanging over our
heads. I'm sure it will be that way forever. Mom is still very worried about me. I think I'm equally worried about her. She doesn't feel well very often and I think that the stress of worrying about me is making things even worse. I wish she would understand that I worry enough for both of us. It would be nice to have that sarcastic ease that we used to have. It's hard to joke about too many things anymore. I feel that if we can't even talk about the important things in life, how can we laugh about the unimportant things? Does that make sense at all? Probably not. I never did make sense when I talked to you. Wasn't that why I stopped coming?

I drive by your office once in a while. I never stop, though. It scares me to think about going back in there. The thought of that little room makes me feel claustrophobic. I'd hate having to admit that I need to talk to you again. I think I'm doing fairly well. You told me that you didn't want me to stop counseling because I still had so many fears. Well, I still have them. I'm beginning to believe that they never really go away.

I found a note under my door a couple of days ago. It was from him. He didn't sign it, but I know by now. I know how he thinks, when he acts. It was time to hear from him again. I didn't tell the police. I didn't tell anyone. Well, Jessi and Chris know. Chris was with me when I found it. He said he'd take care of me, but I know that he can't. At least he was there. I know now that only I can take care of myself.
My fears are almost scarier than the reality anymore. I need to learn to go on.

It's been good writing to you. It's almost like talking, but I get to ask all the questions and I don't have to push myself for answers. Writing has always been therapeutic for me. I knew when I started this letter that I would never send it, but it still felt good to write, anyway. Take care.

Katrina
February 25, 1992  
Tuesday  

The shrill ringing of the phone interrupted my reading of *The Color Purple* right at the point when Celie first met Shug.

"I'll get it!" I yelled downstairs. Jessi was with her new boyfriend and I knew she wouldn't want to answer the phone.

"Hello." My tone told whoever it was on the other end that I didn't appreciate the interruption.

"Hi, Katrina?"

"Yea?"

"It's Katherine."

Katherine. My best friend from St. Michael's grade school. I hadn't talked to her since we graduated from high school. We ran into each other once in a while, but I hadn't really talked to her for nearly four years.

"Katherine, hi, how are you?" I marked my place in *The Color Purple* and leaned back against my mass of pillows.

"I'm okay. How are you doing?"

"Okay," I lied.

"I didn't interrupt anything did I?"

"No, no, you're fine," I assured her. "How's school? Are you graduating soon?"

"I'm finishing my undergrad work in May, but then I'm applying for veterinary school."
I thought back to our childhood days. Katherine was always an animal lover. We used to create an imaginary world where animals could talk and play and sing with us. We even imagined our stuffed animals coming to life. That was our own private little paradise. I had to admit now, though, that if any of my stuffed animals had ever talked to me, I think I would have been scarred for life.

"That's great, Katherine! I can't imagine you doing anything else." I knew she'd immediately be accepted, too. Katherine was our high school salutatorian. She was involved in everything at I.U. I took a deep breath as I realized how much I missed her and how good it was to hear her voice again.

"How about you?" she asked. "Are you going to graduate on time?"

"Close. I have to finish up this summer, but I'm doing it at home so it won't be that bad."

"Have you had any job offers yet?"

"I haven't even thought about a job yet," I laughed. "I'm just trying to get through my seventeen hours of literature classes this semester. It's enough to make anyone boycott reading forever!"

Katherine laughed, but it didn't seem real to me. Memories of our St. Michael's days filled my mind--CYO camp in the summer, swimming in my Uncle Jim's pool, volleyball during the school year. Katherine's laughter had always been contagious, so full of life. This time she sounded hollow.
An uncomfortable silence followed our brief discussion.
"Katrina," she began nervously, "there's a reason why I called you." Her voice was shaking. I could almost see her blue eyes welling up with tears. Her sentences came out short and broken. "I heard about what happened to you."

Breathing all of a sudden became a chore for me.

"I hope you don't mind that I know." Pause. "My mom told me." Pause. Katherine's mom worked for my uncle's office. Of course she knew. It was the first time I actually considered the fact that most of the people who worked for my uncle probably knew about me. "She wouldn't have told me if..." Big pause. "Well, she only told me when I told her what happened to me."

Please don't say it, I begged silently. Not Katherine. Not beautiful innocent Katherine who sat beside me on the first day of first grade at St. Michael's.

She continued slowly, reluctantly, yet I heard an urgency in her voice. She needed to tell me. I could feel her need.

"What happened to me isn't the same as what happened to you. I don't even know if you could classify it as..." she stumbled over the word rape. "I, I was dating him. He seemed perfect for a short time. Then he changed. I wanted to leave, but he threatened me. One night he said if I wouldn't, then he'd kill himself. He always said he'd kill himself. He hurt me, too. He'd hurt me when he thought I was going to leave him. I didn't have any choice. I didn't know what to do."
My voice was shaking so much that even I didn't recognize it when I spoke.

"It is the same, Katherine. He had no right. Nothing else matters once you say no. He should have stopped." I didn't know where to go. What would Karen say? What would Karen do?

"He used to follow me and watch everything that I did. Sometimes he'd call the house and ask my sorority sisters where I was and what I was doing. It was so strange. He just turned on me. I didn't have a way out."

"Is he still around?"

"He graduated in December, but I've heard from people who have seen him on campus since then."

"Oh, Katherine, I'm so sorry that this happened." I felt an ache deep in my heart for the pain that I couldn't ease.

"I didn't call to ask you to be sorry for me," she said apologetically. "I wanted you to know that if you ever wanted to talk to someone, then I'd be there for you. I know it's been a long time."

"It's been too long," I admitted as I yearned for the closeness of a grade school best friend again. I remembered second grade. Our teacher had always liked Katherine better than anyone else. She didn't like me with my short hair and my boyish ways, but she loved Katherine and her long blonde hair and blue eyes. Everyone had been jealous of Katherine because she was teacher's pet. Even I had been jealous. But I had also been so proud to call her my best friend. She's
mine, I'd rejoice when she was chosen to wash the blackboards. She's my best friend. She chose me.

Now we'd both been chosen.

"I'm glad you called me, Katherine."

"I'm glad I did, too."

"Be strong. I can't say that it ever really gets better, but you learn to go on."

"You be strong, too, and remember that I'm here if you need me."

I did need her. I needed her to call me, to remind me of a time that was carefree and full of peace. Thank you, Katherine, I thought to myself. Thank you for bringing me the comfort of our past.
February 27, 1992
Thursday

"Since this is a women's studies class, I think we need to discuss an issue that we've been bombarded with every day in the media."

I sat up in my chair. I was sitting in the middle of my women's lit class surrounded by eighteen other women and two men. This was my favorite class this semester. We were reading books like Jane Eyre, The Color Purple, and Ceremony. We also had a collection of women's diary entries and women's plays. It was a very enlightening class for me. And I needed to be enlightened at this time in my life.

Dr. Goldman continued. "The Tyson rape case is something all of us have had to face because it's been forced into our lives by the press. I'd like to hear how some of you feel about the case itself, the way in which it has been handled, and how you feel about the two people involved."

One of the two males raised his hand. "Personally, I'm sick to death of all of the media coverage. I can't listen to the radio, turn on the TV, or read the paper without hearing another tidbit of information. A lot of that comes from the fact that we're living near Indianapolis, but I'm still really sick of it."

"I agree," another girl said. "When did it become our business to pry so deeply into others' affairs?"
"That's just the point," Dr. Goldman contended. "The livelihood of both of these people lies with the public. One makes money from beating other people and the other basically sells her body for money in beauty contests."

I felt myself tense up, but I couldn't respond. As always, I found myself unable to contribute to this conversation. I had too many things to say and no way to organize them in my mind quickly enough to make an intelligent response. I was also afraid of revealing information that was best kept in the dark.

"I would have to say that because of their backgrounds, these two people were an accident waiting to happen." That comment came from Dr. Goldman and I felt my anger boil. The conversation ensued around me, but I couldn't concentrate on any details. I heard the usual "rape arguments"—she just wants his money, he's been taught to act this way all his life, she used bad judgment by deciding to go to his room. One thing I did notice, however, was that the women in the room were the harshest judges on the victim. They questioned her seemingly innocent naivete, they blamed her for going out on the date in the first place.

When class ended, I was still fuming. Even more than that, I was hurt. I had always found peace and fulfillment in that classroom before. Now it had become a threatening place full of scornful eyes and pointing fingers. I didn't make it all the way home that afternoon. I stopped in the library to write
before my brain burst with all that I had to say. I pulled out the blue notebook that held my required journal entries for that literature class. Every two weeks we were to turn in eight pages of our responses to our readings or our class discussions. I began to write:

Because I could not organize my thoughts enough to respond in class, I am responding to class discussion in my journal. Please don't misunderstand my intent--I may not have understood your intent, either, but a comment you made in class disturbed me. You said that because of their backgrounds, the two involved in the Tyson case were "an accident waiting to happen." It sounded to me as if you were almost excusing Tyson and accusing the victim because of their pasts. Just because Tyson was raised to fight and dominate does not excuse him from the legal definition of rape. Just because the victim enters a beauty contest does not mean she deserves to be raped. (I also disagree with your statement that she's "selling herself for money"). I'm probably taking this to an extreme far beyond your intent, but this is a very sore subject with me. In a world where I feel like I have to defend my right to be a woman every day--in a world where I have to listen to the uninformed, uneducated generalized opinions about the subject--it just surprised me to hear a statement like yours in a women's studies class.

It wasn't pretty. I didn't worry about correct grammar or English usage because it said what I wanted to say. During our next class meeting, I received Dr. Goldman's response:

I'm sorry you misunderstood. Of course I don't excuse Tyson--there is never any excuse for rape. But
I ask you to look beyond these two people and see how society has trained us to praise and reward violence and aggression in men and physical beauty and sexuality in women. I see our society as desperately confused on these issues, and therefore, these two young people are bound to be confused, too. With all the movies, ads, etc. around him telling him that "scoring" with a woman makes him a man, how is Tyson to know better? And with everyone telling women they should look their best, redden their lips, wear short skirts, have breast implants, how are they to avoid becoming the target of male desire? So, no, I certainly don't blame the victim--I blame society for giving such mixed messages about what is acceptable. I also have to take what the other females in the class said with a grain of salt. It's hard for any woman who has not been raped to make a judgment about rape in general. I think many women are so threatened by the possibility of being overpowered that they can't admit it as a possibility--all they can do is blame the victim. To say that a woman is raped is to say that any woman could be.

The next time I attended my women's lit class, I felt a little more at ease again. At least I knew where Dr. Goldman stood. I had a little harder time listening to the comments of my classmates when I had previously heard their asinine comments about the topic that was so close to me.

Our reading for the following week contained excerpts from the diary of Anais Nin. In it, she discusses her deep spiritual attraction to her friend, June. The entry touched me so deeply that I felt I had to write about it.
Anais Nin's journal was very beautiful to me. It made me a little uncomfortable, but in a stronger sense, it was beautiful. I could totally understand Anais and June's "soul attachment." They seemed to be kindred spirits--attracted to each other by physical beauty and by an understanding that goes beyond the physical. I share that kind of feeling with a very special friend. She and I talk about the things that my boyfriend would never understand. We can communicate without words--we are together even when we are apart. And although I love my boyfriend dearly, there is an intimacy shared with women that I have yet to find with a man. But this is something that has been taught to me. I have been very loved and nurtured by the women in my family--my mother, my sister, my aunts, my grandmother. I feel a bond with my mother that I could never begin to feel with my father. Do women and men really feel that differently? I often try to talk to my boyfriend about things that he can't even begin to comprehend (and I consider him one of the most sensitive and understanding men that I have ever known). But Gail and I can talk about the same issues until our faces turn blue. Maybe I shouldn't get so mad at Chris when I feel he's being insensitive. Maybe he just can't feel the same things that I do.

"I'd like to hear some of your reactions to Anais Nin's journal," Dr. Goldman began. I had already written my journal entry, but was eager to hear reactions from the rest of the class.

"I have to admit that it made me very uncomfortable," one girl offered.

"Why?" Dr. Goldman pursued.
"Because I'm very homophobic and this seemed very sexual to me."

"I disagree," another female argued. "To me it wasn't sexual at all. It was very spiritual. June obviously wasn't a lesbian because she had Henry. I think Anais was attracted to June physically, but isn't that why we are all drawn to certain people?"

Okay," Dr. Goldman said smiling, "we've brought up the 'L' word. How many of you were uncomfortable with the homosexual overtones that were implied in Anais's writing?"

More than half the class raised their hands tentatively.

"Were any of you leery because you've felt that close to someone of the same sex?"

She hadn't read my journal yet, but I could have sworn Dr. Goldman was looking right at me.

"I think that you feel that way with most intimate relationships," one female offered. "I'm heterosexual, but I still notice attractive qualities about other women that draw me to them."

"Me, too," someone else added. "I often wonder what kind of fine line exists between heterosexuality and homosexuality. I mean, is it simply a matter of sexual attraction? I love my female friends as much as I love my boyfriend. I'm attracted to them physically, but not in a sexual way." She paused. "Am I making myself clear at all?" The class released an echo of nervous laughter.
"Yes, you are, Anna," Dr. Goldman said. "That's the difficult part. People are very afraid of homosexuality because it's so difficult to define. Because I'm a women's studies professor, I'm often accused of being a lesbian. Some people even ask me straight out if I am. But I can't answer those people because their definition of homosexuality is not the same as mine. I believe that there is no language to describe lesbianism. That's why it's so difficult to think about. You can say that you love your friends, and you love your mate, and you love your mother. You also love your dog and your new car. All of those kinds of love are different, but the English language doesn't have any words to specify the differences."

That, in my opinion, was a brilliant statement. Maybe it was obvious, but I had never thought about it that way before.

I had been so incredibly afraid that I had been turned into a lesbian against my will. Since the night I was raped, I've distrusted all men, been afraid of any male touch. I never felt any physical attraction for a woman, but I lost my attraction for men as well. Even Chris's touch caused me to withdraw, and he was the one man that I truly trusted. I had stayed awake too many nights trying to decide if I was ever going to be normal again. But sitting in that classroom, I realized that I was normal. I just didn't have the vocabulary to describe the intensity of my fear, the extent of my loss of trust. It was the English language that was inadequate, not me.
The most important thing that I learned in that class was that it's okay if you don't always have all the answers. I remember what Mr.-- said to Celie at the end of The Color Purple: "I think us here to wonder, myself. To wonder. To ast. And that in wondering bout the big things, you learn about the little ones, almost by accident."
March 14, 1992
Saturday

"Hey, Buddy!"

The shrill voice on the other end of the phone woke me out of a sound sleep.

"Andi?"

"It's me!" she yelled. "Guess what?"

"What?" I asked, rubbing the sleep out of my eyes.

"I'm coming home!"

"When?" I asked as I began to get caught up in Andi's excitement.

"On your birthday!"

I laughed out loud at Andi's good news.

"I'm so excited about coming home," she bubbled. "I can't wait to see you!"

"I can't wait, either," I promised.

"Guess what else?"

"Are you really going to make me guess at 1:45 AM?"

"No, I'll just tell you. I got Bryan Adams tickets for us for the Wednesday before your birthday!"

"Alright!" I yelled. I had to laugh in spite of myself.

Andi and I had counted down the days until the Robin Hood premiere last year. We had been first in line on opening night. We both melted into big blubbing idiots when Bryan Adams sang "Everything I Do, I Do For You." Despite the fact that it had
been overkilled on the radio, we still talked about how perfect his gravely voice was for such a romantic ballad. I still got chills every time he sang, "Yea, I'd die for you..." Andi never forgot anything.

"You don't have Wednesday night class, do you?"

"No, I don't. Let me check my calendar just to make sure that I don't need to get out of anything. What's the exact date?"

"The 18th."

March 18th. One year later. Exactly one year later. I looked blindly at my date book. It was a mess of blurred numbers and words.

"The 18th looks fine," I said without emotion.

"Well, I gotta go study. See you soon!"
The morning of March 18th began with a cold rain storm. I hated the entire day. Everything I did reminded me of the year before. While I was eating lunch, I thought about the lunch I ate twelve hours before I was raped. While I was sitting in class, I thought about the homework that I had planned on doing on the night I was raped. It seemed that the day would never end, and I even began dreading the night that had already been planned for my birthday enjoyment.

Andi and I left for the concert with a little time to spare. We listened to Carly Simon on the way and talked about the latest school news.

"Are you okay?" Andi asked out of the blue as she swerved the Bravada into the passing lane.

"Sure," I lied. "Just a little tired."

"Katrina," she said as she turned down "Little Girl Blue," "I know what tonight is."

My heart jumped. Andi always remembered.

"That's why I planned this tonight. I wanted to be with you. So let's have a good time, okay. You're among friends tonight."

"Friends?" I asked, enunciating the plural.

"Yea, me and Bryan."

God, she was great.
We enjoyed our favorite past time once we entered Market Square Arena—people watching. There was a great variety at a concert in Indianapolis.

The concert was incredible and so were our seats.

"He's looking at me," I'd whisper to Andi every once in a while.

"I think it was the blonde bimbo that was walking behind us," she'd whisper back.

When the concert ended, we weren't ready to go home.

"Do you think those people over there are waiting for him to come out?" Andi asked.

"I'm sure they are," I said as I watched the small mass huddle together for warmth in the cold winter air.

Andi looked at me with a gleam in her eye.

"Let's wait."

"Are you serious?"

"Of course I'm serious."

"What have we got to lose?"

I couldn't believe that we had become Bryan Adams groupies in the course of about five minutes, but we sat in the Bravada with the heat blasting as we watched the back entrance for any signs of life. Pretty soon, the crowd began dwindling.

"It's been almost two hours," I said when things began to look bleak. "Let's drive around to the other side of the arena to make sure we're not missing anything."
As we pulled out of the parking lot, I noticed a white van exiting by way of a side ramp.

"Stop, Andi," I ordered as I saw a security guard lingering in the general area. "Excuse me, Sir, but is Bryan Adams in that van?"

"Well, I can't tell you that, ma'am."

"Listen," I demanded, "we've been sitting out here for two hours. My feet are numb and it's my birthday. Please tell me if he's in that van."

"All I can say is if you want to see him, you better hurry."

Andi did a U-turn so fast that I didn't even get a chance to say "thank you."

We caught up to the van in record time. "Now don't lose them," I warned. "Stay right behind them. Do you think we're being too obvious?" We laughed in our stupidity and our excitement. The van pulled into Indianapolis International Airport and headed toward the area where private planes are stored.

"They'll never let us in," I whined as I watched the van pull up to a security gate. "Let me out."

I couldn't believe what I was doing, but I ran up to the van as they were waiting for clearance. I tried to look in the window, but they were all fogged up.

"I can't see anything," I yelled back to Andi who was sitting in the Bravada trying to decide where to park momentarily. As soon as the words left my mouth, the van door
opened. Two inches from my face sat Bryan Adams.

"Did you follow me all the way out here?" he asked with the gravely voice that Andi and I had fallen in love with.

"Yes," was my creative reply.

"Then let me at least sign this for you." He took my concert shirt and scribbled his name across the front. Andi was beside me at once.

"Bryan," I began as if we were old friends, "this is my friend, Andi."

"Hello, Andi," he said politely as he took her shirt to sign it.

"Andi bought me these tickets for my birthday."

"Oh, it's your birthday?" he asked. "Better give this back to me." He took my t-shirt and scrawled "Happy B-Day" across the top. He then proceeded to ask us about the concert and about ourselves in general. It was only when the barrage of other fans began arriving that he cut us off.

"It was good meeting you both," he replied politely. "Have a safe drive home."

"You, too," we yelled as the white van pulled into the inaccessible area.

Andi and I laughed at ourselves all the way home. We had been so stupid, so brainless. But it was the best time I'd had in a long time.

"Thank you so much for tonight," I said when we began to mellow out.
"You're welcome." She smiled at me broadly beneath the city lights. "Happy birthday."
March 20, 1992
Friday

Dear Andi,

Thank you so much for my "Excellent Birthday Adventure." You sure know how to throw a party. I want you to know how grateful I am to you for all that you do for me. You're the best friend anyone could ever hope to have. I was sure that the night could only end in disaster, but you changed all that for me by remembering--and by making things better. I will always laugh when I think back to March 18, 1992. It will always be an incredible memory for me. It takes a very special friend to make that kind of memory. Best of luck in your final weeks at Cornell. I'm so proud of you. Continue to be as wonderful as you are now. I look forward to a summer full of shopping. Love you--miss you already.

Katrina
April, 1992

The days began to blend into one after I celebrated my twenty-second birthday. I had a party complete with family and friends and chocolate cake.

I struggled my way through finals preparation and decided to go home the weekend before finals to celebrate Easter with my family. Traditionally, we always go to Easter Sunday Mass, so I decided to give it one more try. I dressed up in my pink floral Laura Ashley dress and tried to enter the church with an open mind.

"Today is a special day for many reasons," the priest began. "Today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ who died to save us from our sins. We also welcome the new members of the elect into our fold today."

The elect? Was the Pope visiting? No one else seemed to notice the strange choice of words, so I listened carefully as the priest continued.

"These chosen people have completed all of the steps that are necessary for Baptism into the Catholic church. Would they please approach the altar as their names are called."

I sat silently in my pew trying not to let my mouth hang open too widely. Never before in my life had I heard new members referred to as "The Elect." What exactly did that mean? Were we honoring them with the glorious gift of Catholicism? Were we telling them that they were now worthy of joining the Chosen
Few? I realized sadly that that's exactly what the church was telling them. These people were being taught the same things that I was taught in second grade. You can't go to heaven unless you're a Catholic. Catholicism is the only true religion because it was not founded by man. You must confess your sins to a mediator in order to be forgiven. Your God will not allow you to approach Him directly. He has better ways to spend His time. It was very clear to me in that I could no longer allow myself to be a part of a congregation of self-proclaimed saviors. I wanted to keep my mind open. I wanted to worship my God without having to ask a human being for permission. I wanted to be able to find my place in a world that wasn't judgmental. And although I knew that that would never be possible, I had to take the small step toward equality that I was able to make. It might never make a difference to the world situation, but it made a difference to me.
April 22, 1992

Wednesday

Finally, finally, the day was within reach. Only two days of classes and one week of finals before I was finished with Muncie, Indiana. It seemed almost unreal it was so close. But I knew it was real. I felt like I might even be able to reach out and touch the end of the line.

My final appointment of the week was with the Dean of the Honors College. I had to meet with him to discuss my senior thesis which was the last requirement I had to complete before my graduation. It was the wonderful requirement that was going to allow me to live at home and work independently. Nothing sounded better.

"Good afternoon, Dean," I greeted as I was led to his huge back office.

"Good afternoon, Katrina. So good to see you again."

He had to be bluffing. The last time I'd seen him was when I transferred to Ball State three years ago. Since then he'd seen a million different faces and heard a million different names. I was sure that I was an insignificant number to him. It didn't matter, though. As long as he would approve my thesis proposal and give me the key to my freedom, I was willing to be any number that he chose.

"So, you're graduating in July?" he mumbled as he looked at my records. "And your senior honors thesis in the only thing
you have left to finish?"

I nodded even though I assumed he was talking to himself.

"Have you thought about what you'd like to do?"

"Yes, I have," I assured him. "I'm not sure if it qualifies
for an acceptable thesis, though, that's why I needed to talk
with you as soon as I could."

He leaned back in his chair nonchalantly. I noticed the
rows of psychology books behind him and I remembered that he
was a psychology buff. Was he analyzing me?

"What do you have in mind?"

"Well, I wrote a young adult novel when I was in high
school. Of course, it never went anywhere. Actually, it wasn't
even good. So, maybe I'm trying to redeem myself, but I'd like
to write another young adult novel."

"That's a perfectly good topic," the Dean assured me.
"Since you're an English major, I think it's a marvelous choice.
Have you found a faculty advisor yet?"

"No. That's been my biggest problem. But I'm still working
at it."

"As soon as you find someone to advise you, send my office
his or her name and we'll get the process started here.
Meanwhile, you write to your heart's content and we'll see you
on July 18."

"Thanks so much," I said as I shook his hand to leave.
"See you on the 18th."
The cool spring breeze that caressed my face as I left the building was a reassuring comfort. I looked around at the flowers in bloom and I realized what a pretty campus this was. It was a shame that my view of it was covered with a dark cloud of fear and shame. Maybe in another life and another time I would have felt some reluctance to leave this world of books and parties and roller-blades. But I had no regrets. I was more than ready to leave, and I knew that I would not come back.

Finals week flew by. I had six literature finals and I thought I would lose my mind by the time they were over. Luckily, my senses remained intact through that stressful week. It was time to move on.

"Have you found a roommate for next year?" I asked Jessi as we packed our dishes into separate boxes.

"Yea, I'm living with a couple of sorority sisters. I don't know how it's going to work out, but it's a nice apartment."

"Well, I hope everything works out well for you," I said with genuine concern. Jessi had been a good roommate and a good friend. We had grown apart toward the end of the semester, but it wasn't because we fought. Our worlds just began to move in separate directions. Jessi had become our newly elected Rush chair, and she was always running off to different meetings. I was spending more and more time with Chris and my family. I never made a conscious choice to grow away from Jessi. I guess that it just happens naturally sometimes. She was still
very special to me. I admired her determination, her will to succeed. She was much more motivated than many of the nineteen year olds that I knew. But she was still nineteen in some ways and I was still twenty-two. I don't think that age always has to make a difference, but sometimes it just does. Jessi had a wonderful world for herself. She had a new boyfriend, a million and one admirers, and a killer figure. She was going to survive without me. I would survive without her. But I would always remember how she helped me survive when I needed her most. It was strange for me to come to the realization that sometimes people aren't meant to follow the same path despite what they wish or work for. Jessi and I were meant to go different ways. But that was a peaceful realization for me. I wanted her happiness as much as I wanted my own. I wouldn't forget her and we would keep in contact, but it would never be like it used to be. Goodbye, Jess. Happy life to you.
"So, how does it feel to be home?" Mom asked once my fifty-five pairs of shoes were finally packed back into my closet.

"It's good. Very good."

"It's good to have you back."

"It will be even better when Andi gets home," I admitted.

"As soon as she comes home, I'll never see you again, so I don't mind if she stays at school for a little while."

"It's going to be strange without Chris." He was staying to take summer classes and to teach swimming lessons. "We spent every waking moment together toward the end of the semester."

"Things are good between you again?" Mom asked.

"Better than they've been in a long time."

"Oh, I forgot," Mom interrupted, "Tim's been calling to find out if you're home yet. You might want to give him a call."

Tim. My sweet handsome friend that I hadn't seen since my twenty-first birthday. I had written him off my contact list not because he was mean or negligent as friends go. He had never lied to me, hurt me, or abandoned me when I needed him. But he was a man.

It was painful to admit to myself that I was willing to give up a beautiful friendship just because I had been forced to give up my trust in all people. There was something very
wrong about that and I knew it was time to change it.

"Hello, Stranger."

"Katrina?"

"Yea, it's me. Do you remember me?" I laughed, hoping that I hadn't let too much time come between us.

"Of course I do. I really miss you. Is everything okay?"

"It is now."

"I've been calling your mom and trying to get in touch with you. Let's do dinner tonight and catch up. Are you free?"

Not quite, I thought. But I'm getting closer.

"Let's go to Flakey Jakes."

What a great suggestion. That was our place. Tim and I always chose the place with the best hamburgers in Indianapolis.

"I'll pick you up at 5:30."

"It's a date," I promised.

Only the slightest twinge of apprehension ran through my body as I climbed into the car that had taken me to Flakey Jake's a million times before. I hated myself for feeling any reluctance, but I knew it wasn't a conscious reaction. It was a reaction that came from deep within my soul--from a wound that would never really heal. He had left a horrible scar. And even if no one else could see it, I knew it was there. I knew it would never quite disappear.

Tim and I had a wonderful evening. As we sat and laughed together, I remembered all the times that he protected me from
the jealousy of a lost relationship or the pain of a broken friendship. He should never have been a threat to me. He didn't deserve that title. But in my mind's eye, I had to assign him that label because he was one of them. He had the weapon, I was vulnerable.

Somehow, I let Tim back in. Somehow he got past the barriers I had built to find his old home inside my heart. I was so grateful that he did. He helped renew some of my faith in humanity by proving that he was steadfast, constant, and trustworthy. And he was a man.

* * *

"Did you have a good time with Tim?" Mom was reading a book when I returned home that evening. Her feet were propped up, a glass of water by her side.

"We had a great time. I really kind of shut him out for a while. I'm glad he didn't give up on me."

"I'm glad you didn't give up on him."

I noticed the swelling in Mom's right let as I talked to her.

"Are your legs bad again?"

"They're bad all the time, Trine. Sometimes they're just worse than other times."

"Do the doctors say anything different?"

"No, it's all pretty much the same. I think they've pretty
much ruled out MS, but they're still talking about neuropathy."

"And there's nothing they can do for you?" I probed.

"Apparently not."

I thought about the pain that my mom experienced every day of her life and it made me feel so selfish. I had been so wrapped up in my own pain that I had put hers aside. When I was at school, Mom's pain wasn't real to me because I didn't see it every day. Now I was home and I saw the swelling, the endless pills that she was forced to take for any kind of relief. I saw her stumble out of a chair after sitting too long, trying to carry the painful dead weights that dangled beneath her. She had been taking on my pain and her own. How did she ever survive? It was time for the tables to turn. I wanted to be strong for her so she wouldn't have to worry about me anymore. Maybe I really wanted to be strong for myself. Either way, I knew I wanted to make a change so I could make things better for my mother.

"Trina, I didn't want to worry you while you were at school, so I didn't tell you what's been happening lately. But now that you're home, I think you need to know."

I looked at her with worry-filled eyes.

"Whatever I have is progressing. Whether it's neuropathy or if it's MS, it's progressing to other parts of my body. I have it in my eye now. Sometimes the pain is so intense that it takes all my vision away. I'm going to an ophthalmologist
next week to see if he can tell me anything different. I just wanted you to know."

"Is there anything I can do?" I asked.

Mom shook her head and smiled at me. "No, honey, I don't think there's anything anyone can do. Jimmy has me on steroids and they're the only thing that seems to help. I keep thinking every morning I get up that I'm going to find a beard or something when I look in the mirror."

I tried to smile, but I couldn't. It wasn't really fair how life worked out. I was almost done with school. This was the time that Mom could think about retiring, about traveling and doing all the things that she's always dreamed about doing. But now this mystery disease was going to keep her from reaping the benefits that she had earned with a hard life of slaving. I hated the way things worked out. Life wasn't supposed to work that way.

I laid in bed that night trying to think of a way to make things better--for Mom, for me, for the world. It's difficult to realize how small your individual voice really is in such a massive world. I thought about my thesis. I couldn't decide what topic to write on. It had to be something that spoke to many people, maybe not just the young adult world. "Personal testimony is often the most effective writing tool." The voice of my creative writing instructor echoed through my head. And at that moment, I knew what I had to write.
"Can you start training tomorrow?"

"Sure," I replied. I was anxious to start making money again. I had just happened into a restaurant in the mall and I had inquired about waitressing positions. I filled out an application, and I was hired within fifteen minutes. I hoped that this experience would be better than my last waitressing experience.

I was pleasantly surprised by my new place of employment. Everyone accepted me willingly. They were the nicest group of people I could have ever hoped to work with. The job part came easy. We would work all day and then go out together after our shift ended. It was a tight-knit group, very reassuring. Most of the guys who worked there were gay. For some strange reason, this made me feel secure. That seemed like such a contradiction to me since I had heard a million times, "Rape is not a sexual act. It's an act of violence." Still, I had never met more caring, sensitive men. Even though I still carried my stun-gun with me when I went out to my car at night, I felt safe while I was working.

"Let's all go to Claude and Annies tonight after work," Nick from the kitchen suggested. There were three servers that were still on the night shift.

"Great idea," Judy agreed. "Are you going to go?"
"I can't," I whined. "I really need to get going on my thesis or I'm never going to graduate."

"What are you writing your thesis on?"

I was startled into silence for a moment. I had never been asked to describe my thesis, and I had yet to tell anyone what I was writing about.

"Case studies on rape," I lied, unable to admit that the true case study was myself.

"Well, if you need to talk to any more people, I'm willing to talk to you," Judy responded. She said it so matter of factly that I couldn't reply. She just went back to pouring her tea, like she had just been talking about a spot on one of the glasses.

I stopped her after work.

"Judy," I said hesitantly, "my thesis isn't on actual rape case studies." It felt okay to talk to Judy. She looked at me with non-judgmental eyes and I knew I didn't need to be afraid.

"I'm actually writing about my own experience with rape," I admitted.

"I think that's a great thing to do," Judy answered with genuine admiration. "I think a lot of rape victims could benefit from reading about other victims. That way, they know they're not alone."

I nodded.

"I'll still give you my story if you think it would help."
Judy and I did get together that next week. I was scared to hear her story, but I was eager to hear it, too. It was such a strange comfort to me to hear the testimony of other rape victims. Maybe that's what my creative writing professor had been trying to teach us.

"What can I tell you?" she asked as we sat in a small booth in the same restaurant that we worked in. She lit up a cigarette and ordered a strawberry margarita.

"Whatever you feel comfortable telling me."

"I can tell you everything. Should I just start from the beginning?"

I nodded as I picked up my pen and positioned my notebook. A cold chill of apprehension slid down my spine. I wasn't sure I was ready for this. But I had to be. The time had come for me to be ready.

"It happened fifteen years ago," Judy began. "I was twenty years old, and I was already a junkie. I was living on my own, partying every night even though I wasn't old enough. My one year old daughter was with her father. I was free from all responsibility. The thing I remember most was that he seemed so normal, so harmless. He followed me into my apartment building and asked me if I knew where someone lived. I told him that I didn't know, and I started up the stairs. He had
ample time to leave, but I never heard the door open. In an instant, he was behind me with a switchblade at my throat."

She was telling me my own story.

"He said to me, 'Don't scream or I'll cut you. Just go upstairs and unlock the door.' I did what he said because at that moment, I knew I was going to die. I knew that whatever else happened that evening didn't matter because I was going to die. I was glad I was going to die. I believe that your memory is the only thing that can truly hurt you. If he killed me, I'd never have to relive that pain again."

She lit another cigarette.

"And he hurt me. He hurt me bad. But I really don't think he thought he was hurting me. He said to me, 'I've chosen you to be my woman. I've watched you, and I've picked you out. I want you to be my woman.' At that moment, I panicked because I realized that he wasn't going to kill me. And I was going to have to live through that pain and then live it over and over again."

I couldn't speak, couldn't question. Judy continued.

"I went to the hospital when he was finished with me. They examined me and sent me on my way. They never offered me any counseling. The police investigated, but they never pursued the case. There were similar cases in the neighborhood, but they were never followed. They didn't care about a young white junkie who have been ravaged by a black wanderer. They probably thought I invited him in."
"The thing that still stays with me today is the fear. I don't think you ever really get over that. I don't even think counseling would have helped. When you stick your fingers in the fire as a child, you learn that it hurts. And the pain eventually goes away, but you always remember how much it hurt. And you never do it again because you're afraid of the pain. That never really goes away."

"I feel like I've been stolen from. Rape is the greatest theft that can happen. I'll never get back what he took from me. No amount of compensation can replace what I've lost. It's been fifteen years and I still feel that loss. As a result, I completely distrust men. I'll probably be alone for the rest of my life because I can't allow myself to get close to a man. I've experimented with women, but I can't get into it sexually. If I could, I'm sure I'd be a lesbian and rid my life of men forever."

I thought back to Dr. Goldman's women's literature class.

"I know that I would recognize him today. His face is still fresh in my mind."

Judy wasn't spared the luxury of forgetting.

"If I saw him today, I wouldn't hesitate to kill that black bastard. And I'm not a violent person. I'm a vegetarian because I don't believe in inflicting pain on any living thing. But I would buy myself a .38 Magnum and blow his black brains everywhere. That's how much he hurt me. That's how much his memory hurts me."
I sat in silence, unable to even drink my iced tea. My notebook was empty, the pen laid in it's original position.

"Do you want to ask me anything?"

I shook my head. Fifteen years and the fear was still haunting her every day. There was really no escape. I thought about the movie Grand Canyon. Mary McDonnell had spoken a line that had remained with me from the moment I heard it: "Something has happened. You can't go back and not have it happen. Some kind of connection has been made and it has to be played out."

He was connected to my life, interwoven throughout all of my ambitions and desires, all of my fears and inhibitions. I couldn't go back, I could only go forward.

"Thank you so much, Judy. I really appreciate your time."

"I hope I gave you something you can use."

Oh, you did, Judy. You did.

I drove home after our interview and stopped at my sister's house. Amber was just waking up from her nap. I ran upstairs, eager to feel the warmth of her soft small body in my arms. Sleepy eyes gazed up at me from underneath a Beauty and the Beast bedspread.

"Hi, Aunt Kertrina."

Her sweet voice was hoarse from sleep.

"Want to lay down and read me a book?"

I climbed into her bed and read One Fish, Two Fish while she snuggled up next to me.

"Let's sing a song," she said when I was finished reading.
"Do you want to sing 'Jesus Loves Me'?" She shook her head. "How about 'You Are My Sunshine'?" No. "I know, you want to sing Michael Jackson." Still no.

"Sing me your song," she pleaded as her china-doll eyes stared lovingly into my own. She needed me. She needed me to love her, to read to her, to sing to her. She needed an aunt to take her to the zoo and to Dairy Queen. She needed someone to give her a cookie when Mom said "no." And I needed her small hand in mine. I needed to watch her grow. I had to be there on her first day of school, I had to hear about her first kiss. We needed each other. That's the way the world worked. That was the only part that made sense.

"K-K-K-Katie, beautiful Katie, you're the only one that I-I-I-I adore."

Her little rosebud lips moved with mine, trying so hard to remember the next word.

"When the moon shines over the mountain, I'll be waiting at the k-k-k-kitchen door."

"Sing it again," she whispered. So I did. I sang it again and again as I rocked her tiny body in my arms. This is what matters, I thought. This is what's important.

"Is someone awake from her nap yet?" Carrie called as she climbed up the steps. "Are you two going to stay up here all day?"

"Let's hide!" Amber ordered as we pulled Beauty and the Beast over our heads.
"Where could Amber and Katrina have gone?" Carrie joked as Amber giggled under the covers. "I guess I'll just have to go get ice cream by myself."

"Here we are!" Amber screamed as she pulled the covers down. "We were hiding!"

We were hiding. But I knew that I would never hide again.

"Let's get ice cream!" Amber begged.

"Great idea!" I agreed as I scooped her body into my arms and smoothed down her tousled hair. "Everyone needs chocolate on a day as pretty as today!"

"Who's going for chocolate?" Mom said as she stepped into Amber's room.

"Memaw!"

She jumped out of my arms and ran to Mom.

"Memaw's home from work, Kertrina!" Amber squealed. "Now we can all play in my playroom!"

It was the best idea I'd heard all day. Well, maybe not quite as good as Dairy Queen, but definitely a close second.