



This is a map of their watching me.

Kristin Sanders



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“In *This is a map of their watching me*, Kristin Sanders creates a verbal diagram of ways the female body is admired and ignored, worshipped and taken. Sanders’ voice is hypnotizing and bold as the body rearranges itself—gravitating toward, turning away, letting you in, ‘open like an entrance dark.’”

—Chelsea Hodson, *Pity the Animal*

This is a map of their watching me.

—
Kristor Sanders

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How could all this passion be produced from figures of pain?

—Georges Didi-Huberman,
Invention of Hysteria

I was the nanny for the sculptor's two children. I was twenty-five. His beautiful wife— also an artist. It was summer. I was in love with no one, an object of affection.

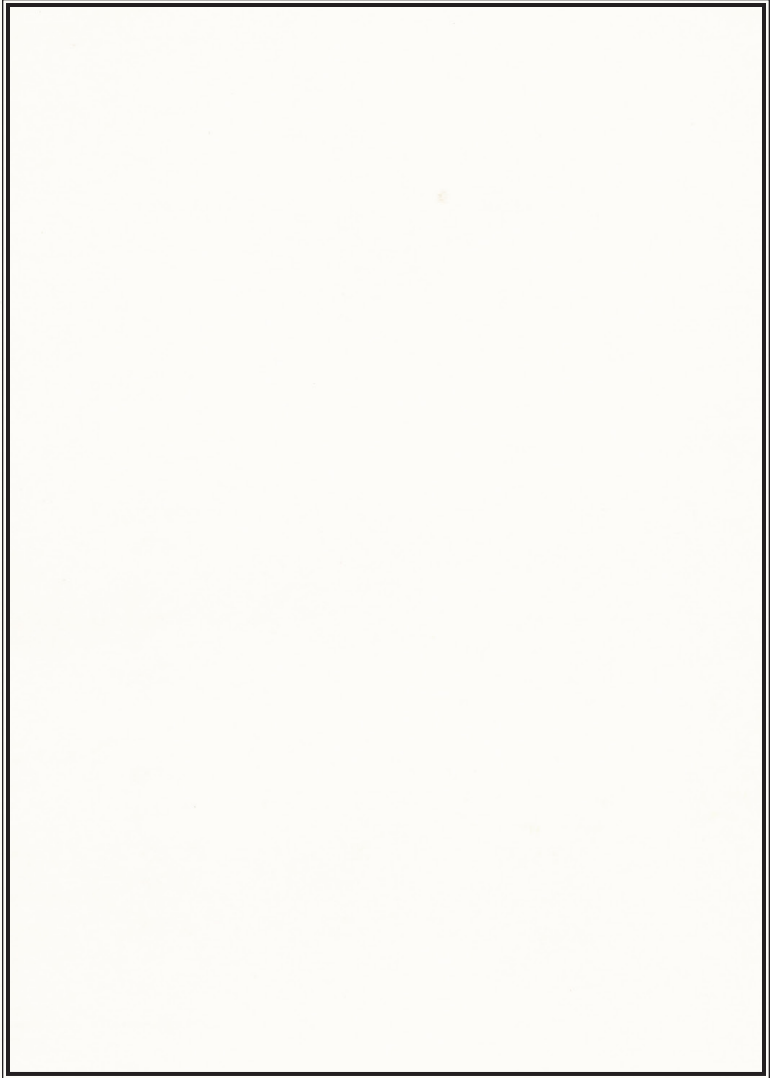
(The sculptor: who was he in love with?)

We began our collaboration in June: two large black notebooks, passed back and forth. We each had one at all times. He drew (women who were not me); I wrote (to people who were not him).

I thought of Augustine and Charcot. We both did. How I performed desire, my body the words on the page, writhing. He wanted me to be the artist's model, but I refused. Except once.

Notes to Accompany the Images:

Figures 1-15



(Fig. 1)

Fig. 1: Falling or playing dead or lying there or wrapped up or mummified or making a sign, a symbol.

I was busy being classified. I was busy being looked at. What about all the other bodies, can we examine the other bodies. I wanted to rely on some trauma to explain it all. All of the other women were worse off than me but I kept on being never not enough. What about all the other bodies, where do they go. I was busy making myself look one way for them to look at me in another. When they walked into the room I remembered the color of old wine poured down a silver sink, the smell. When I saw blood I remembered trees. Men brought flowers. I brought what they took and I gave it. I am looking for the other bodies and their traumas. This is so embarrassing. That I cannot remember the color of their eyes.

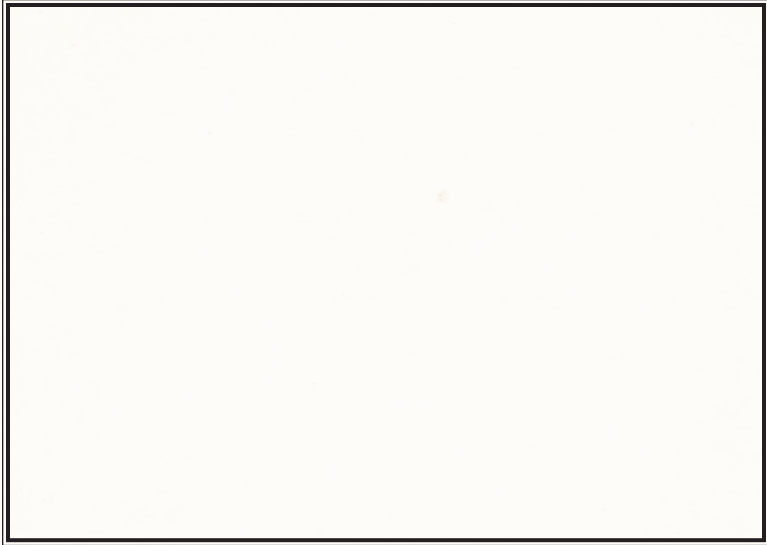


Fig. 2: What the girls say.

Feels good when you watch. Feels good when the camera is in the room. Feels good when the men crowd. Feels good when he says do this we do. Feels good when we pretend not to notice the other eyes. Feels good when the other eyes are looking at us we look back feels good. Feels good when the other eyes search our bodies for our bodies. Feels good when our bodies make a crowd gasp the men gasp feels good. The words don't feel good they hurt us like here is an edge to tie you up wound wound wound.

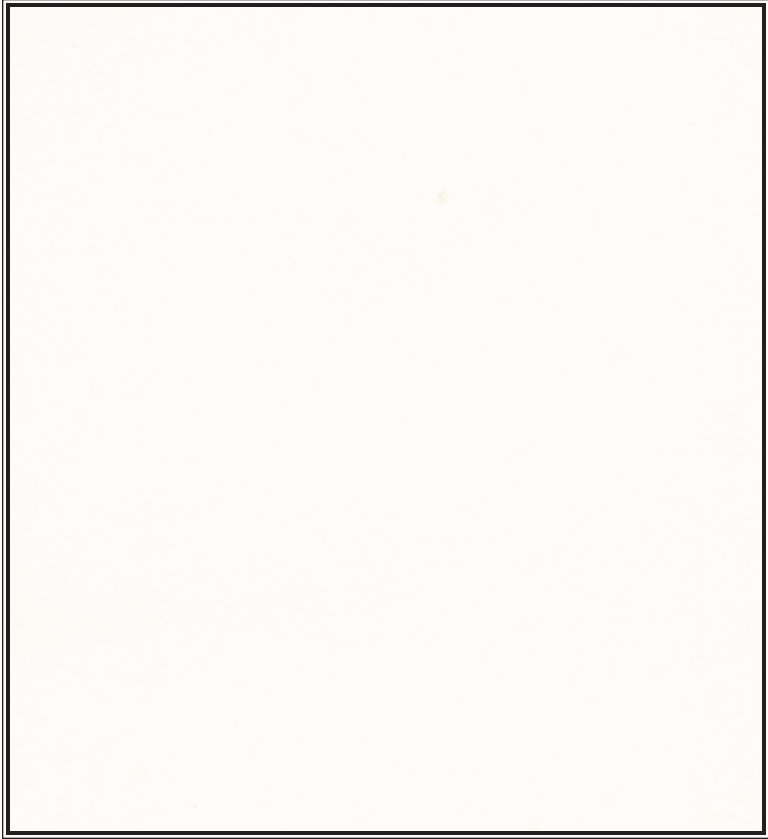


Fig. 3: When I am told to hold very still.

This heat is making me want to touch things that are not mine.
Which is why I keep— Look at what I could give you, if you'd
just—

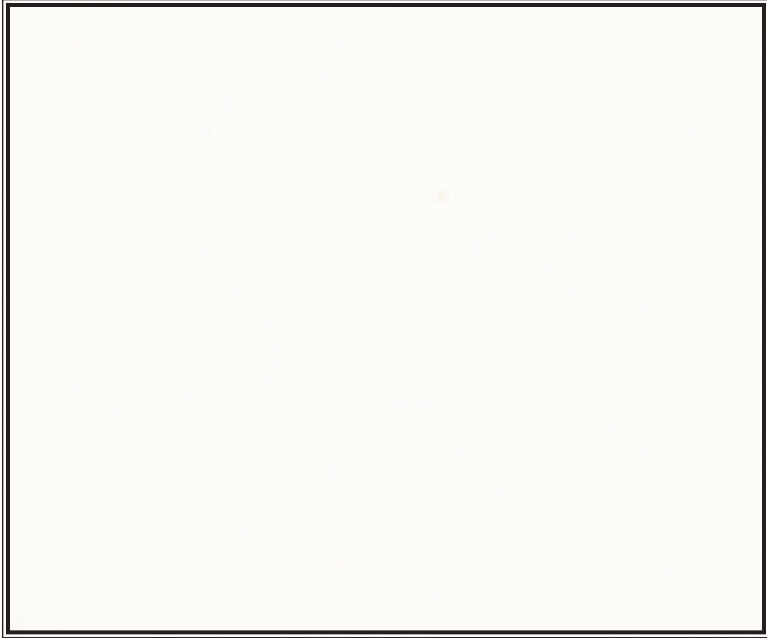


Fig. 14: Then I have succeeded.

Here is my body: my upright, my all-yours body. Which is only an exchange. A currency. A way to win. How could you ever ignore my body when here I am offering you this photographic evidence. I know that my body is an end and this will never mean enough. Although I'll try, it will mean nothing. To me: nothing. Don't forget that, even when it seems like I am shouting truths into your tireless heart.

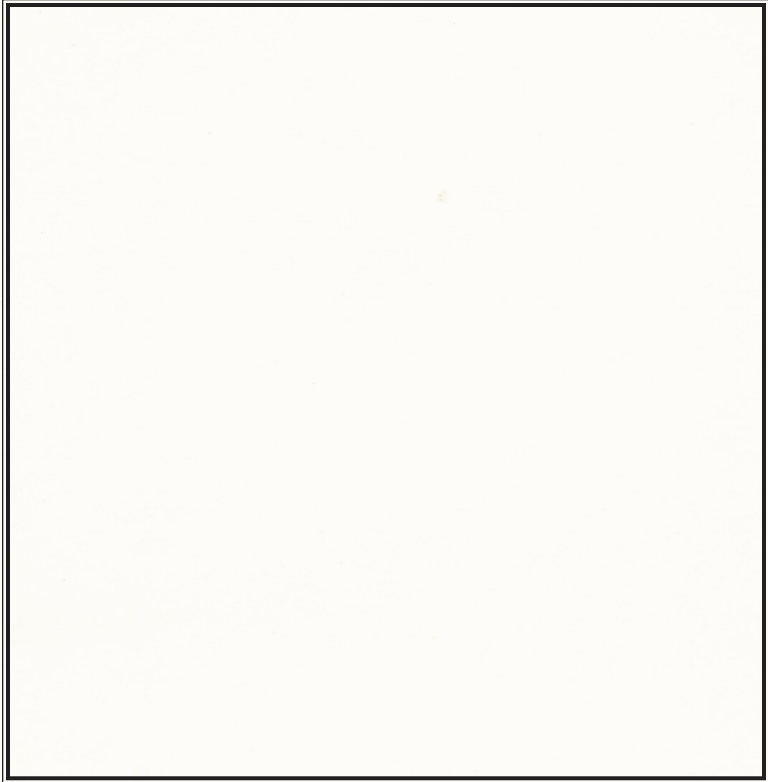


Fig. 9: An outline is taking shape.

She was always pulling her body into the smallest spaces. Folding in, wrapping pale arms around or behind her head, a braid of limbs. A halo. We were impressed. We liked things tight, the luggage of her, we could carry her everywhere.

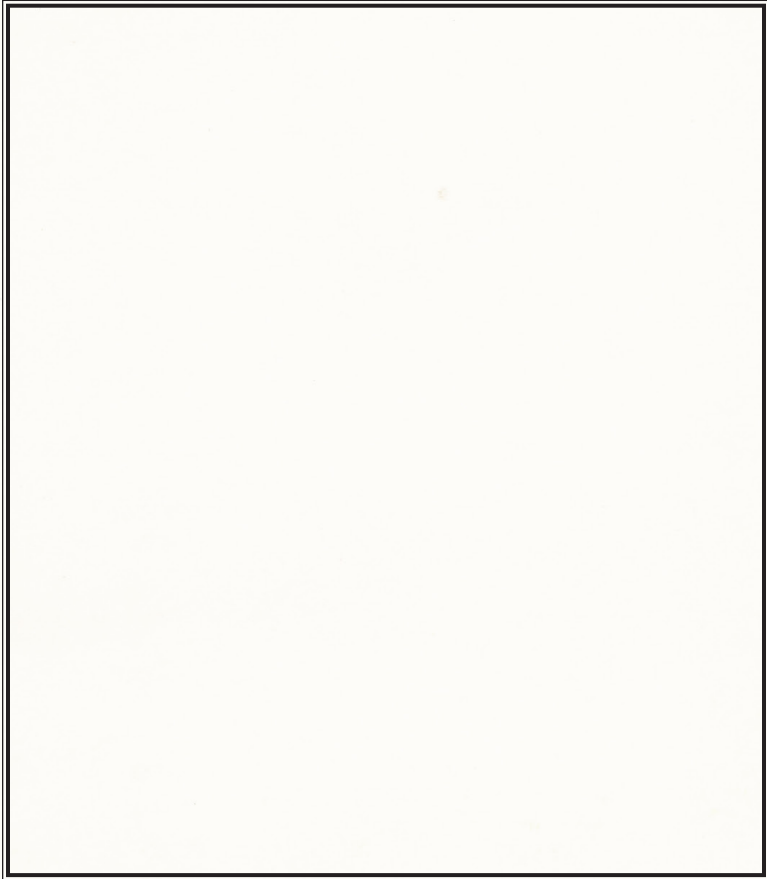


Fig. 7.b: Making a spectacle of myself again.

This horizon, this slow crawl across the horizon. And all this time I thought I was getting somewhere, dragging my blue move along.

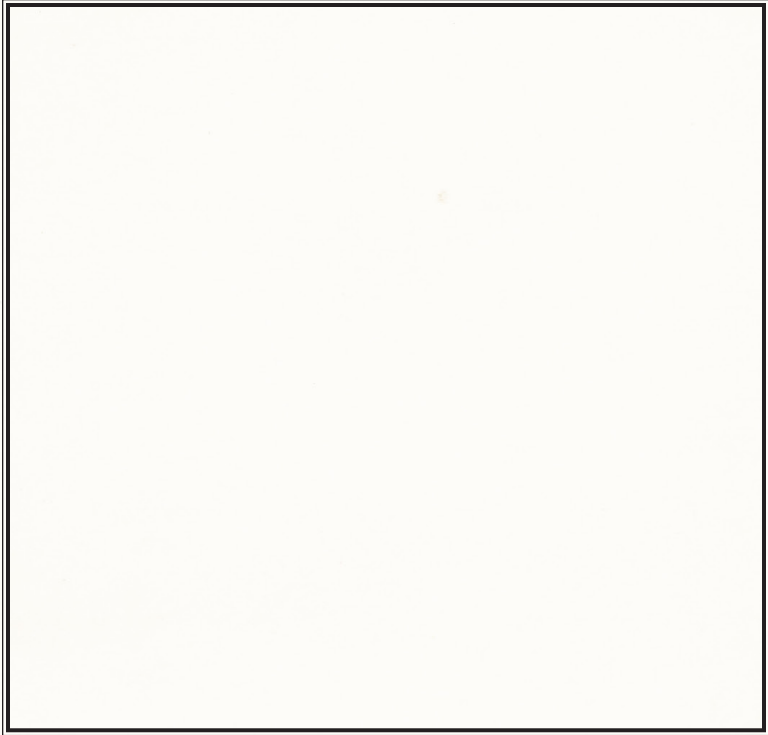


Fig. 12: Where I was not bitten, I am not swelling up.

This can't go on. I am crying to signify grief. Even the smallest movement of your heart and I am all shadow. One moment I was playing in the tall grass, the next I was tied to a tree. Something tightened in me, a ball chain tugged down, a light bulb lit up in my glass throat.

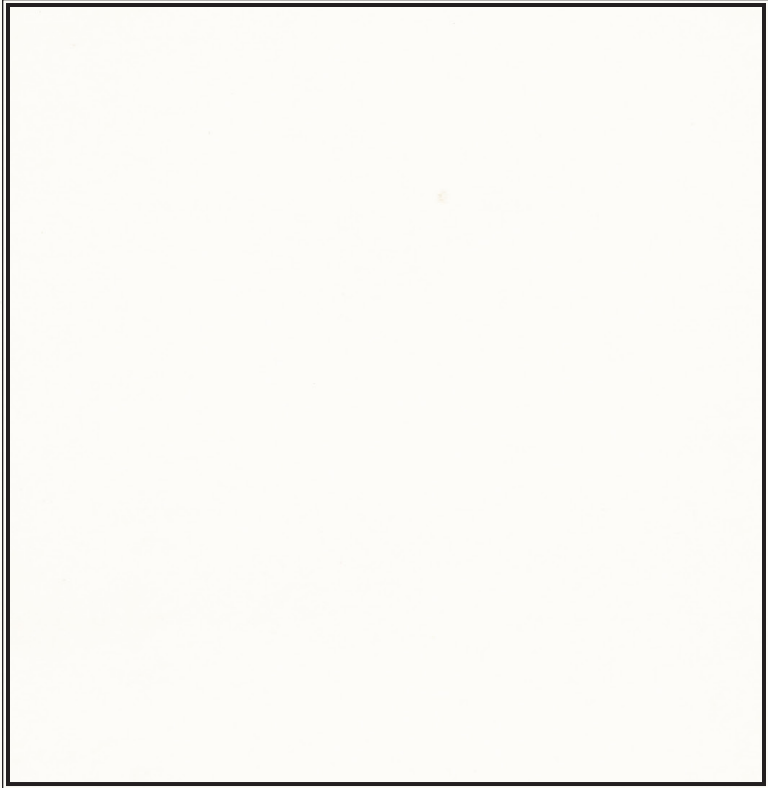


Fig. 10: For example, how I've grown to be too much.

He said he could never love a woman who had tripped and fallen in front of him. He said he could trace it back to one childhood memory of a woman in white falling on gravel. He left the room. I rearranged myself on the bed.

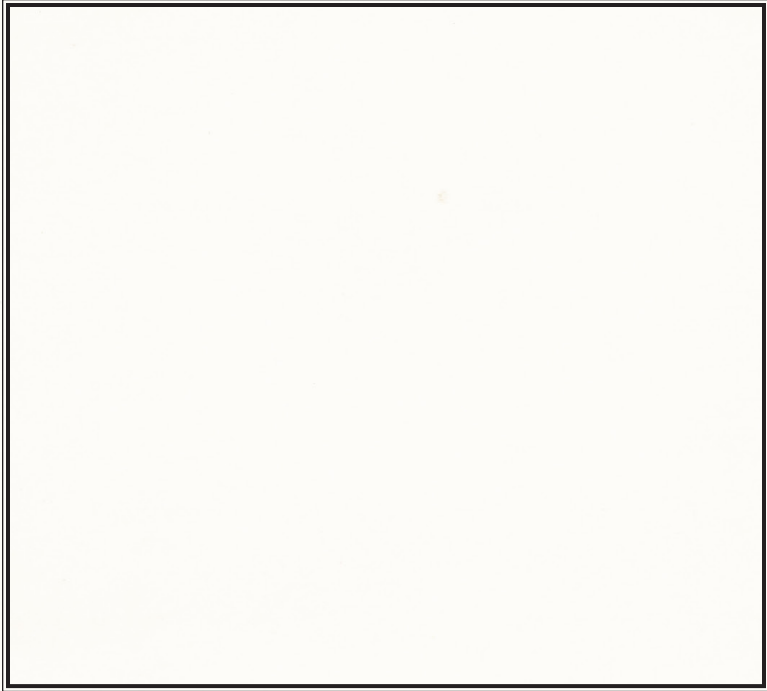


Fig. II: Please don't while I.

Please don't watch me while I do this, I said and I made a movement like loss with my palm. I am dying of loneliness. It was while you were in the room, I had to, if you weren't going to do it yourself. Still, I turned away. We will never touch each other again like that day in your bedroom, the leaves wet and layered on the skylight, the sun and the grey an envelope, slipping us inside.

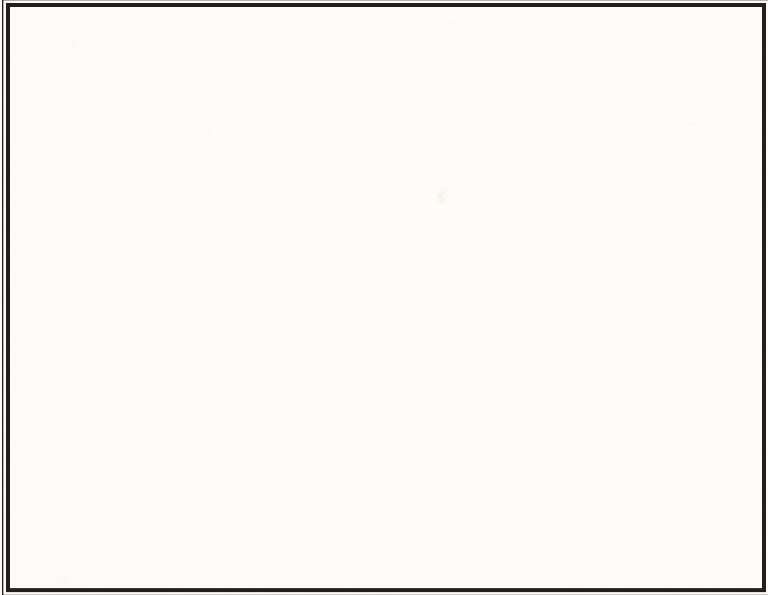


Fig. 6: God, it hurts just to watch it.

If I were going to be completely honest, I'd say I'm sorry for turning away. For saying yes in the first place. For pretending, for removing my makeup at the best part. For not maintaining the illusion of edges, for letting you in, for wearing only my most revealing skin and nails. I'd say, you cannot look at me now. It would hurt too much, to see me wrapped and unwrapped in all the wrong places, to see the bright artificial light reflecting off the mirrored glass inside my holes. To see yourself there.

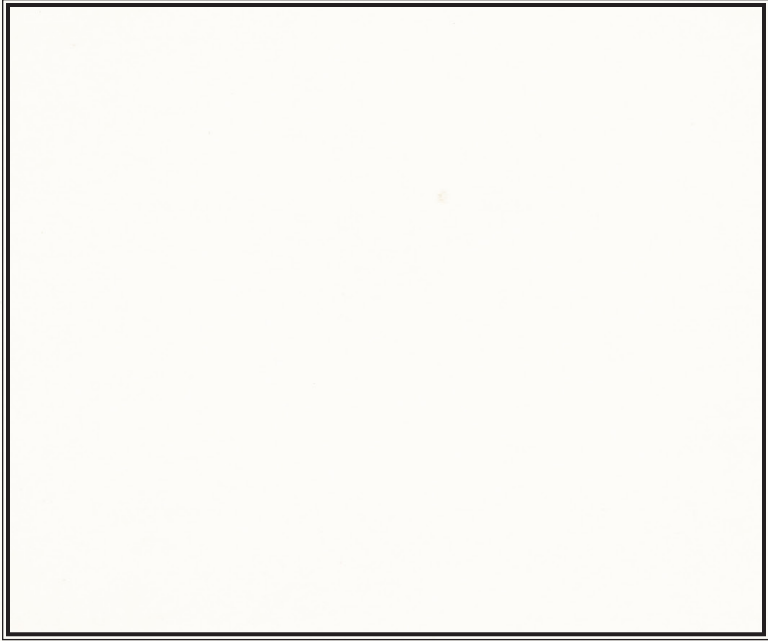


Fig. 5: Trust me, he said, and I let go of.

I recognize these shapes from all the books and all the sounds I have made. There is your body and his body and his body and his. Would it kill me to move in circles, would it kill me to move a little more like an alphabet of oceans. A smell that any room can recall. I was feeling my skin against the walls. I was thinking in squares and photographs. No, no, in shells and oil pastels, smeared like heat on our spines. What watery language. What slow hope.

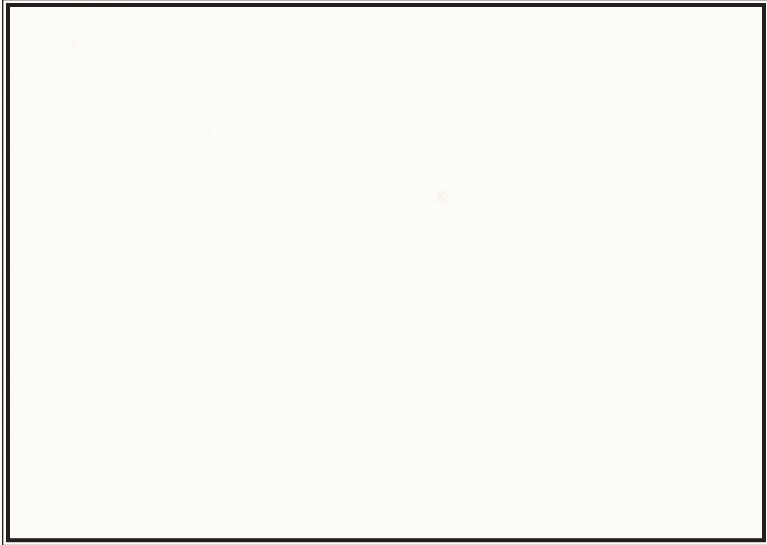


Fig. 4: All the rest are his.

He is lying there, arms like a coral reef. And she is screaming. Can't he hear it. She is writhing, she is trying to turn away. What is shame. Even if the sound is only inside her own ears. Head thrown back. His legs are folded. He is even proper in his desire for her. She is ripping out pieces of herself. But quietly, quietly. Her fingers, her earlobes, the left half of a breast. As if in a green pool, some of the pieces float. Some sink. Some catch on the jagged tips of his pink arms. He feels nothing, in the water, he feels nothing but love for her. The silent pain of her makes just the smallest waves.

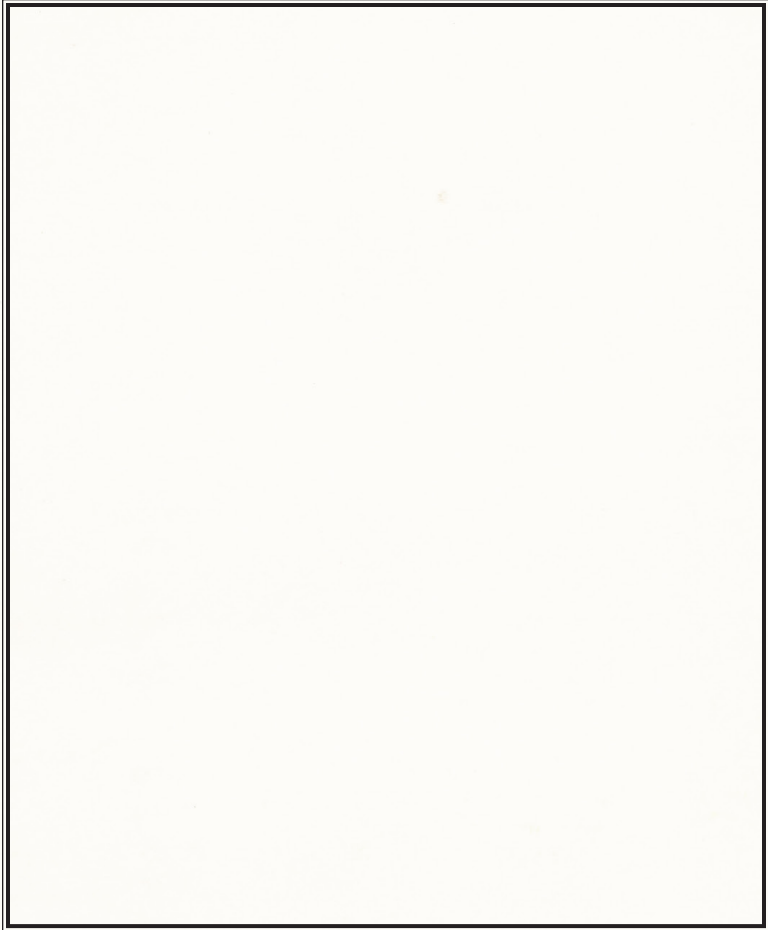


Fig. 7.a: My palm is red.

From trying to make the whole world want me.

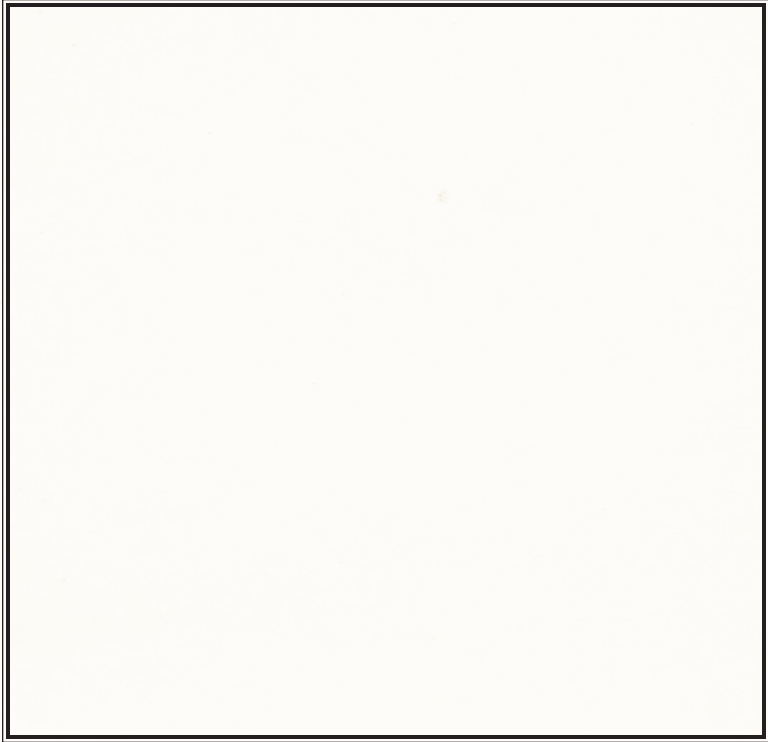


Fig. 8: Don't look. Look.

Can't he look at all no. Can't he make a head for himself. Lift up. Untie your own arms and spreading limbs like a train. Folding up he is refuses to look at me. Wish he wouldn't. Am I open and making a movement like *come in*. He all torso, all ribcage. I all birdwing beating in his heart, and open like an entrance dark.

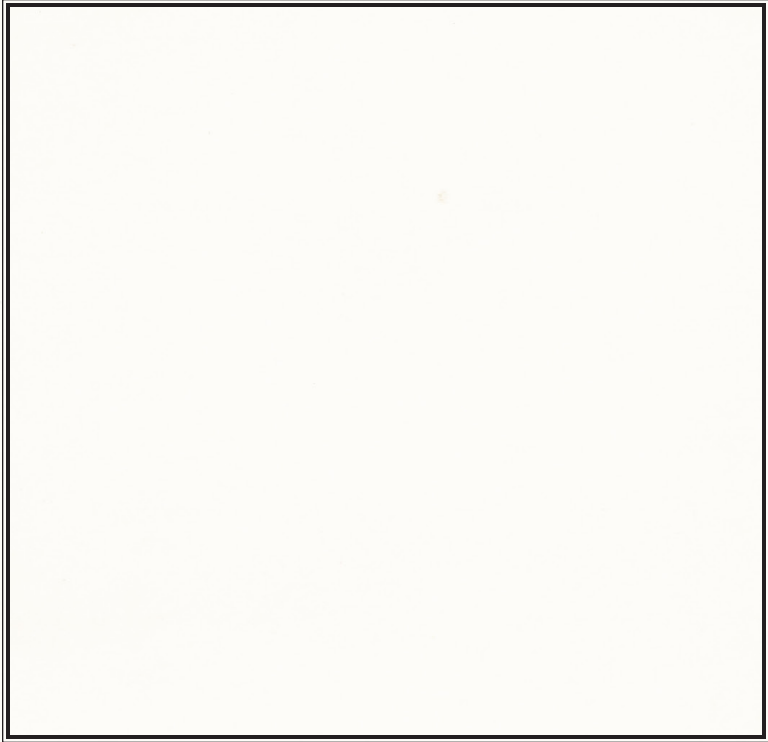
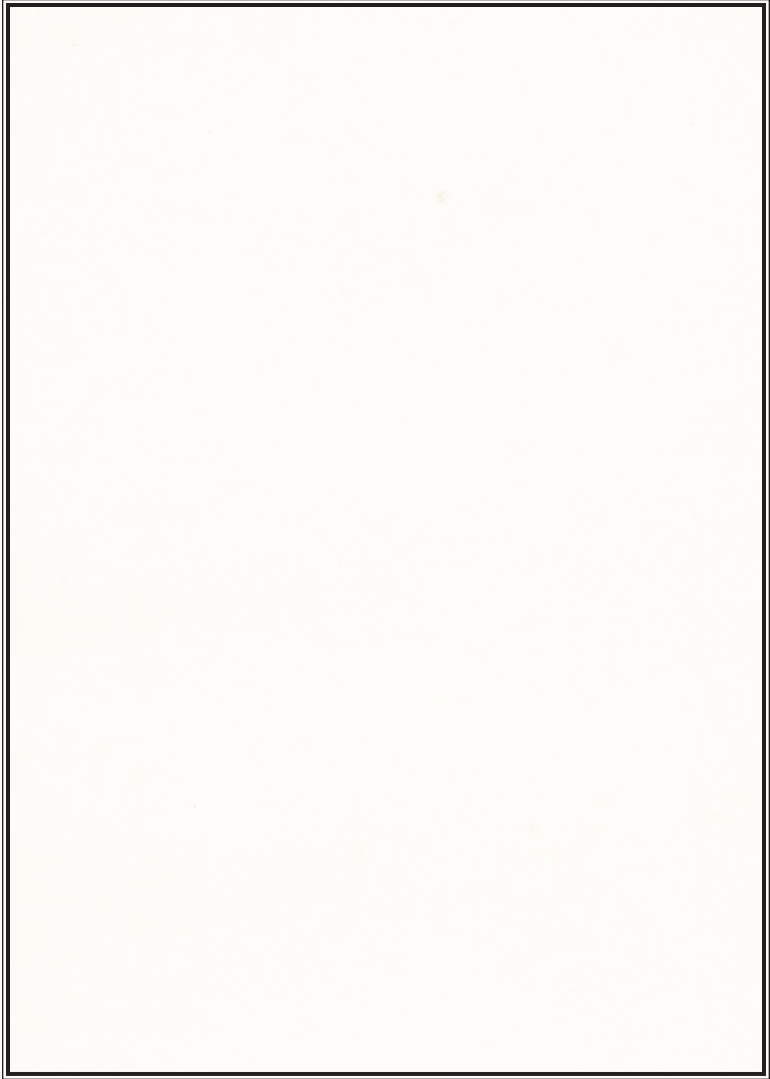


Fig. 13: His clinical knowledge.

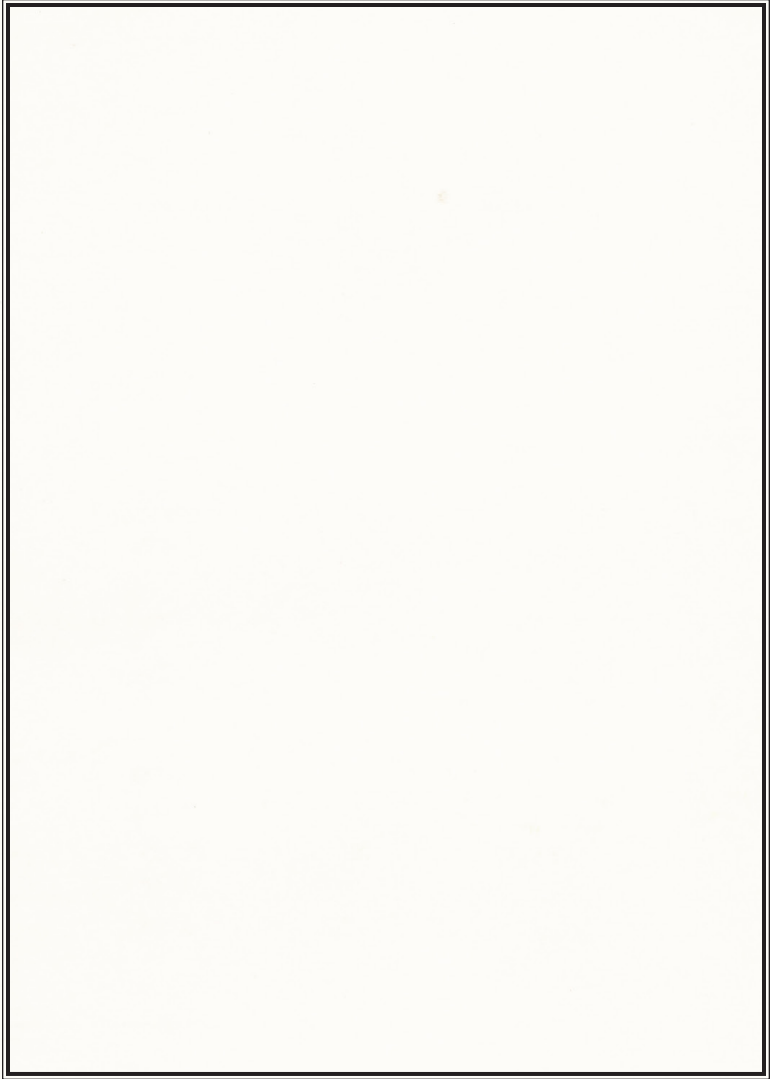
He said he could feel the heat between her legs. She felt red on all the lines she made beneath the sheets. She still felt this distance. His cool blue to her touch. She closed her eyes as he moved against her and felt a spectrum of sea green, grey sky, an ocean lining up against clouds. What it didn't feel like was yes, I have to. I must.



(Fig. 15)

Fig. 15: They always want me to look a certain way and I am only happy when pleasing them.

Which means I must erase my mind. Which means I must fill and empty, fill and empty and erase. Which means I must be fill and empty, they are fill and I accept and empty. Clean it out. Clean it. Which means want less, take less. I have to which means a certain thing for them. I do even if and who are they, which means I must. I which means them because they said so. What do I have if not their approval. Which means I must. Was I sitting there looking the right way because if I was not I must. Must clean it out. Which means there was something there before them. They thought to buy me a look and it stuck. It sticks on me, it must. If I do it right, let it stick and fill and empty it afterwards it will be clean for them. I must. If they like the look, the pose, the yes-now I can have more, want less. What luck. This is me making a way in their world. I am moving my feet. Moving my feet where my mind was. Look at what might happen, look at all these little thoughts on the floor.



(Fig. 15: detail)

Fig. 15: They are attempting to examine the relationship to pain.

I was trying my best to please them. But my instruments kept changing, failing, when I looked to their faces for approval. Half of me was right there being enough for them. Which half. An audience of all the wrong words and faces. Sewing their questions to my answerless form. Which half. I was a body on a stage. I said to him, I wish you could feel how wet I am. There are so many voices, these voices, and no matter what I say they do not make sense, how are we all connected here, what if I am trying to say this and I fail. Maybe pretend mine is yours for a while and make a tool of me to see how you like it. Which half. You choose.

The shape of the camera he looks at me through. The shape of the eye he looks at me through. The shape of the mouth he devours me through. The shape of the computer screen they see me through. The shape of the television they watch me through. The shape of the film shot. The shape of the stage. The shape of the confession. The shape of the box. The shape of the mirror. The shape of his tongue. The shape of her hand. The shape of the phone screen. The shape of the photograph. The shape of the border. The shape of the room. The shape of the door. The shape of the window. The window is closed. Which side of the window am I on. Which side of the screen am I on. Which side of the shot am I on. Which side of the room am I on. Which side of the page am I on. Which side of the eye am I on. Which side of your eye am I on. Which side. Which eye. Yours. Your eye. Your eye.

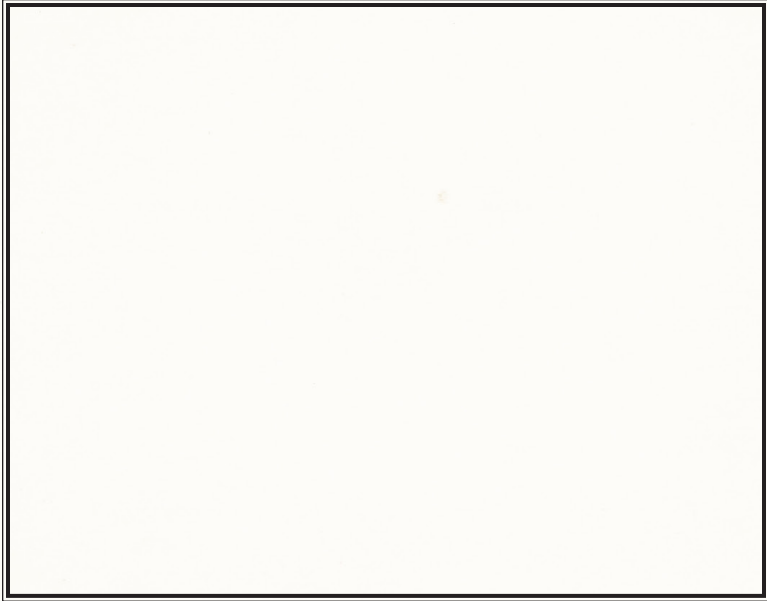


Fig. 15: When it starts to hurt is when I begin to like it.

The repetition of images reminds you of what. Can you love something unnamed. You get used to being in a little room, alone. Tighten up. Hold it in don't say it to anyone. Do we never lose the need. Think of what can be hidden by holding your limbs a certain way. Or what you have to show to be understood. This is what desire feels like. It is easy to be alone. It only hurts when I remember all the other people. And the way they touched me, and how hard it didn't work. How hard they tried.

I thought we were writing to a mystery. I didn't think we were writing to each other; I didn't think the drawings were ever me.

I can be so naïve.

There was one exception. Look. I know this is me. I worsened, I whored, I mean I wore my clothes the whole time. See the clothes. See how innocent. See how blank the face is, pouty, the empty look of refusing to look back.

Images to Accompany the Notes:

We will have to ask the artist for his permission.

Kristin Sanders is the author of the chapbook *Orthorexia* (Dancing Girl Press). She holds an MFA from Louisiana State University. She is currently a poetry editor at *The New Orleans Review*, and teaches in New Orleans.