

October 6, 1997

Rosemary,

You've been on my mind all day.

I was barely able to focus in class. I've been thinking about asking you to the festival in a few weeks, but there's no way in a million years that I'll ever be able to summon the courage.

Still, I can't help but imagine us on top of the ferris wheel, kissing and holding hands. I imagine that it's just the two of us, looking down on the town and the sea of trees beyond it.

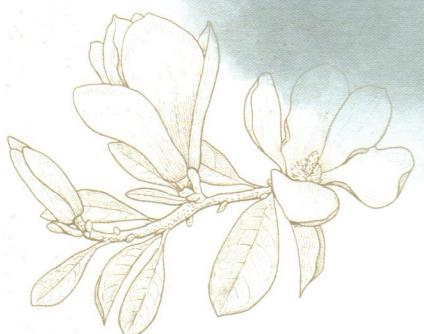
Instead, I'm out here all alone in that sea of trees, right by where those college students supposedly went missing a while back, and that poor little boy, too.

You know, there's a bloodstain on the tree trunk I'm sitting next to right now. It's mine, from a time I must have gotten a wicked splinter or something without noticing, and it's almost perfectly in the shape of my hand, even though I could have sworn that I didn't bleed nearly that much when I got cut. I can press my own palm against it and it almost feels warm. That's how lonely and pathetic I am: I've been reduced to holding hands with a tree.

I've been out here since sunrise, and I guarantee that when I get back home in a few hours the only thing my parents will care about is whether or not I track mud into the house, and not that I've been hanging out in the murder forest for weeks, playing hooky and writing down my daydreams about a girl who barely knows I exist. You know, like a total creep. God, am I lame.

You're never going to see this because there's no way in hell that I'm ever going to give it to you. I'm going to shove this letter all the way to the back of the hollow of this tree and shove any thought of you all the way to the back of my mind.

Hudd



October 10, 1997

Hudd,

Even though the walk was long and even though I got more than a few cuts and bruises on the way, I'm very glad that I insisted you bring me to the hollow yesterday, and that you let me bully you into showing me the note that you wrote.

I know that you go out there pretty often, even though I can't for the life of me understand why, so I hope you'll find this note in the next few days. I'm about to sneak out on my own to hide it inside the stump right next to the first one.

Things have been tough at home lately. Jess has been a total mess lately, and my parents seem to think that ignoring the fact that she's a total mess will make her less of one, when it's having the opposite effect.

This might sound silly, but I'd kind of been blaming this place for all of my family's problems, even though I don't believe in any of the stories. Like, not even a little bit. But still, some part of them must have gotten to me without me even realizing it. I mean, after all, I've sure as hell been avoiding the woods up until now. But coming out here with you took away some of the mystique. A place is whatever you make it, and you've made this place a safe haven for me over the past few days.

This is all to say, thanks for the note. It was good for me to read, in a lot of ways. This is me returning the favor.



Yes Hudd, you are very lame. But you're at least three times as cute as you are lame.

- Rosemary

October 12, 1997

I've been having the same nightmare every night for weeks, about something huge and formless coming down from the sky and swallowing me up. I wake up and go about my day, but I can never shake the need to glance up at the sky and make sure I'm safe. Except when I'm with you. When we're together, I forget that dream entirely. I know I'm safe when we're together.

You bring me peace, Rosemary. I want to be able to bring you peace, too.

October 15, 1997

You do, Hudd. You do. No one's ever made my heart beat like this. No one's ever made my words stick in my throat like you do. Even though it's cold out, even though the wind makes the dry leaves and twigs on the trees rattle like bones, when I think about you I only think of summer, and life, and light.

Sometimes I can't help but wonder what it would be like if, sometime in the spring, we stayed out here late into the night and watched the stars. Just think about waking up next to each other in the morning, when the sun shines through the leaves. I know we couldn't actually go through with it, but I like to picture it nonetheless.

October 17, 1997

I'll watch the stars with you any time and almost anywhere. Not here, but anywhere else.

My mom always tells me that love is hard work, but falling for you was so easy, like magic. You're the best thing that's ever happened to me. My protection against everyone and everything else in this town.

KEE'FO DE LNUF'D.



October 29, 1997

I'm sorry it's been so long since I've replied. My parents have been keeping a close eye on me since they saw us holding hands at the festival. My dad isn't as awful as he seemed, I promise.

That present you won me is so great to play around with. I've been acting out little scenes between the animals like a kid, and slotting them together and taking them apart over and over again. I like that the animals form a whole new creature when they're together. I kind of feel like you and I do that too.

With love,

<E<F LNJF E

October 30, 1997

I never knew what I wanted before you. Now, I do. I want this. I want us.

To be loved by you, that's all I really want.

Hudd



October 31, 1997

The next time we meet out here, let's **LJFAD ECF ROT>GJLUV**  
**ROT>E >PJV V><ET.**

Since the hollow area inside of it is where we've been leaving all of our letters,  
we should leave a mark on the place where we first fell in love. Our love will be  
a part of the land itself.

>PJW JUE<> R : F+P, VF>>OO POF O ROT>GJLUV  
EC J LF>>LO POF R, CEFOMAOF.

November 1, 1997

>PJ > VE<OJV LEAGOT. >POMF O JFO VE EPE<  
VJ C V>EF.ROV JUE<> >PJW ZTLO. LO>'V OFE  
J L HAG< EOO >EFOM>HLO R.

Hudd

