

ALPHABETICAL

DIARIES

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None of the characters in this book have their
literal analogues in the author's life.

ALPHABETICAL DIARIES

A book about how difficult it is to change, why we don't want to, and what is going on in our brain. A book can be about more than one thing, like a kaleidoscope, it can have many things that coalesce into one thing, different strands of a story, the attempt to do several, many, more than one thing at a time, since a book is kept together by its binding. A book like a shopping mart, all the selections. A book that does only one thing, one thing at a time. A book that even the hardest of men would read. A book that is a game. A budget will help you know where to go. A bunch of us met to have dinner that night, but I left and walked off by myself, bought the silver ring, a bag of chips, then sat in the main square and bummed a cigarette off an old French man, then continued to sit there for many hours until the man with the bulgy eyes came to sit next to me and flirt. A bus came which was going to the ferry, but because I

hesitated before getting on, it drove angrily away. A certain kind of bore who has said all he is saying, said it all before, and expects to hear nothing new from you on the subject. A certain lack of self-centredness, belief in one's own innate genius, and faith in hard work, long hours. A child to love in that way, a man to want in that way, and all the collaborators; people with whom I can write the most heartbreaking books, and the books I write alone. A child until he is seven. A city in which people speak another language is good, because their conversations are not so distracting or irritating. A commitment to the relationship with the full understanding that the relationship will evolve and change as you two evolve and change. A curiosity about self-help. A desire to do acting. A desire to help people. A desire to uplift humanity. A different way of living now, according to my feelings and values, rather than according to stories and symbols. A drive to town for booze with Tom to get vodka for watching the movie. A fashion designer in *The New York Times Magazine* yesterday said, *I decided to be my homosexual self*. A feeling that he will completely reject me, that I don't know what's going on, or that he's mad. A feeling that I could occupy myself with this feeling forever. A feminist feeling. A few minutes later he returned and untied me. A few weeks ago there was a tick in my head, a kind of check mark—it happened in a dream and upon waking—about

where I am in life, I had reached adulthood and the task would be different now. A few weeks ago, sleeping with him, I realized for the first time what it meant to have sex with somebody. A flush went up high in my cheeks. A funny thing happens with regards to men when one suddenly comes into a bit of money. A glamorous life I could be leading in New York, full of parties and glamorous people, never feeling sad, alone, left out, apart. A hot man who loves me. A human knows too little to answer such questions. A human must be responded to by a human. A husband is good insurance against the crazy, against the many things of the world. A Jane Austen novel, of course, or inspired by that. A kind of tyranny to think about beauty and love all the time, when there is really nothing to think about. A lack of values, a lack of privacy, and a lack of modesty, which is making me feel kind of sick. A life in a new place for a while. A life which is beside the main current of life. A little correspondence with Lemons. A little distance between this energy and myself. A little nervous. A little too long, and it's boring now. A look of concern, like my mother's look of concern, is settling over my face. A loss and an unhappiness. A lot of changes are happening. A lot of fear, but of what? A lot of people in their twenties get an addiction. A lot of talk about couples and dating, but the more I think about it, the more I think I've been in a pretty sweet situation this past month,

not dating. A man must part company with the inferior and the superficial. A man of discretion. A man to love. A man who could physically kill me in under a minute is a man who is easy to sleep beside. A man who goes out in the world and gets what he wants for himself. A man who I could have in the centre of my life, even a child, and my family could fit themselves into the healthiness and happiness of that. A man who would be mine. A manic feeling yesterday made me almost rent out that apartment in New York, but I won't—it's not yet time for that. A mild form of hysteria, always. A moment after seeing him, a big lurch went through my stomach, and I tried not to look at him as we talked. A new relation to life. A new relationship, born from the ashes of the old and dead one. A new tone, a new ringtone. A nice kind of animal impulse to want to sit near a tree, just because it's a tree, and we continued to drink, from the blue goblet, the vodka and orange juice that Tom had squeezed with his bare hands. A person's life should not be so filled up that a surprise friend can't come in, but that doesn't mean they have to become your new best friend. A person's loyalty should always be to their partner, but I talked more than I wanted to or intended to about Pavel. A phone call from him yesterday—a surprise. A place I partly crave to settle into, but don't. A playfulness, a sense of life being without consequence, that voracious sexuality that wants to eat things

up, that selfishness, that kind of confidence and cockiness and ease, being on top of things, being in New York. A quiche and then an apple pie for dessert? A radical sympathy with all people based on their integrity as becomings, not beings; as people who experience the potential freedom of their own souls, so to radically know that people experience themselves from the inside, and not one person alive has ever experienced themselves from the outside. A return to writing. A ritual sacrifice of the purest animal I could find. A savory pie followed by a sweet pie? A series of titles? A shoddy world. A simple life, he would go home to have dinner with his wife and kids every night. A single life, good for so many of the phases and periods of life. A sudden happiness pierced me. A sweet kiss with him in front of the grocery store on Bloor, he kissed me on my cheek and I kissed him on the lips, just a sweet, little one. A tendency to idealize the past—that's me. A tremendous amount is lost when there's a break-up. A trip to L.A. A trip to New York. A wanderer on this tiny patch of earth. A waste of time, drinking. A white moth is resting on the windowsill. A woman and two men are travelling in the desert. A writer has to follow their curiosity, first and foremost. A writer is just one person under the stars, one person in a universe, writing about a whole entire universe. A young and attractive woman feels it should be otherwise, in her head. Ability

to find monologue books. About decadence and narcissism. About humans in general. About leaving town. About to sell it soon, I think. Action in conformity with the situation. Activity and haste prevail. Actually, he doesn't love you. Actually, he doesn't want you. Actually, he is looking around the world for another girl, and because of who he is, he will find her and be with her. Actually, not that much is expected of you. Actually, people expect less of you than you think. Add that in as well. Added in about four thousand words, bringing it to 56,000. Advice from the old theatre director came in the form of *drop the word ex-girlfriend*, and Lars promised himself he would let himself be fucked if it would take him to two cities, London or New York. Affirmation can always be found from someone in any crowd, if that is what you are seeking. After all, I could only laugh at receiving that email from him, today in the courtyard, realizing I had chosen to forgo one man in Italy, only to return to two back home. After all, I never wanted anything to fall back on. After all, one does have to get back to work. After breaking up with him, I felt absolutely manic. After he left, I lay in bed, hungover, and the sun was shining into my room for the day. After hearing Agnes say that she is trying to stop crying, I think I might try that, too. After that, all I wanted was to play with my future children in a sun-dappled room. After that, I was in the shower, and I realized that

despite the fact that the sex with Pavel had been bad, and I cried, I still felt happy. After that, I will have a clipping, and I will return to the agent I liked from the spring, and perhaps he can sell my story to *The New Yorker*, which will make me enough money to live there for seven or eight months. After that, invincibility. After the pool, we went into the shower and made out. After the show, I got drunk and did merch with Joseph. Afterwards, we all walked by the river. Agnes and I climbed the mountain and it was so intense up there on the lookout, crying and crying. Agnes has her jealousy, too. Agnes having a baby doesn't make me want to have a baby, but there is a way her life seems to move forward, everything around her always changing. Agnes is picking me up in an hour for her cottage. Agnes looked like a dignified woman suddenly, sort of neutered but still very pretty, and when a man our age came up, it turned out they knew each other because their children were friends, and she spoke of this connection with him in the way of a woman behind a wall, alluring but not meaning to be, but more alluring because she was behind a wall. Agnes said I would feel jealous for another fourteen months, and that she used to feel a lot of jealousy, too. Agnes said she doesn't think about breasts. Agnes said she had been crying all morning because she had left her daughter in day care for the first time, and she saw her daughter's face through the window,

and her daughter had looked sad and confused. Agnes said she hadn't gone out with him because he wouldn't be a good provider. Agnes said she needed to be without her mother to grow up and feel able to be a mother herself. Agnes said she was taken in by her husband being handsome and manly; he was a doctor and charming and an intellectual who could talk about anything. Agnes said she wouldn't want to be with anyone but her husband because he is hard on her, calls her on things, and makes her a better person. Agnes said the most important thing is, *do you feel loved?* Agnes was so beautiful and pretty in her bikini, her body looked fabulous. Agnes who I love so much. Agnes who seems to have figured out everything before she was twenty-five. Agnes's life has so much integrity because around her is only what she wants and loves. Ah well. Ah well. Ah, who cares? Alice Munro's first book appeared when she was thirty-seven. All I am ambitious for is to publish this piece. All I can think about right now is fucking. All I ever wanted was to be an adult. All I ever wanted when I was younger was to be a writer, to be able to sit in one place and write things forever, and not feel like I had to do anything else. All I want are moments and more moments. All I want are some more experiences with him. All I want is to have breakfast with my friends, then to return home to this bright and beautiful sunny day. All I want is to read books for a year. All I want

is to tell him that he should take care of himself, that he doesn't need to take care of me, that I can take care of myself, and that he ought to take care of himself first. All I wanted the next day was to get up and exercise, but when I woke, I was so tired from not sleeping the night before, that I did not. All I wanted was a physical life. All my faults are good for writing, what a strange thing. All my work is so pleasurable these days. All of a sudden he didn't seem very smart to me, and his belligerence wasn't very interesting, or his interest in gossip, or his vanity about being in New York and coming into contact with certain people, or his insistence on seeing me in a certain light. All of my twenties were so strange, all of life is so strange. All of them move forward in time and art without me. All of this is just the part of me which is my sexuality, which is why I have always wanted to escape it, why I have always wanted to be celibate. All of this must be doing something to me—to be devoted to him even in times of hardship and sore feelings. All of this seems key to the next part of life. All of this seems like the culmination of some searching in my life, but that's just the way I look at life, full of beginnings and endings. All of this will be impossible if I am with someone who makes it impossible. All of those projects seem dead, even the new novel seems dead, everything does. All of Toronto feels banal. All the elements of the world, everything I encounter

and that other people encounter, can be put in a book. All the faith you had in art, you can have in this man. All the key players of my life are here, I feel. All the misery I always have when living with a man must not be some post-traumatic memory from the past visiting me, but something much more simple and mechanical, like that when I start living with someone, I start behaving in certain, patterned ways. All the people I hang out with who make me doubt, for various reasons and in various ways, my ability to keep a relationship going. All the people like Claire, for whom in their current relationship the sex is great. All the piles of dirt on the floor, waiting for me to collect them and put them away. All the really great things that have been created in art have been created by adults. All the time wondering what he's doing that makes it so he cannot write or call. All this morning, as I was cleaning up and wearing my green skirt, my thoughts kept thrusting Lars into my mind. All this should make me happy, but it's hard to relax. All this trip I had been trying to channel Simone de Beauvoir, thinking, *how would she behave on TV?* All this wandering about the world. All those weeks on tour, I felt consistently overtired, shaky and confused, and there was not one day when I did not fall asleep before the sky started to get light with morning. All we talk about is the way he wants to fuck

me, and when he humiliated me last time, I felt flushed and angry, but then I liked him even more, even though I was ashamed to admit it—but it did turn me on, that he had the gall. All weekend, ever since he tied me up, my thumb has been buzzing with numbness. All white hair and so vibrant, a woman who knew what suited her—not a perfect life, but she got out of her marriage because it was not for her; she was not the marrying kind, she said. All you have wanted since you were twenty-five was to get back to that place of being seventeen, seeing friends who live close by, having sex, reading books and writing. All you want to do is go home, curl up and die. Almost collapsed writing that story. Alone in a room. Alone. Alone. Alone. Alone. Already I am feeling happier. Already I feel a spring of happiness inside me. Although what if living honestly doesn't get you where you want to go? Always feeling this tremble of insecurity and fear. Always having to smile and reassure everybody. Always I don't want to hurt the other person's feelings, so I act as pleasant as possible, meanwhile I am exhausted and getting a headache. Always the other is a source of strife in psychoanalysis. Always to be identifying the disease within ourselves. Always wanted to write a book that people would love. Always your books should be uninteresting. Am basically down to \$0. Am checking email once a day and read-

ing in the mornings. Am I going to finish cleaning the bedroom and the kitchen? Am I looking for love? Am I making the wrong decisions? Am I narrowing my life because of him, or just changing my priorities, and it's a bit messy, and it's going to be messy because I'm making new and different choices, which is what I want to do? Am I not being an artist now? Am I ready to give up my independent life? Am I saying that I'm marrying him now? Am I to spend the next day, two months, six months, however long, longing for Lars, hanging on his indifferent and careless emails, which he writes and sends and does not worry over? Am I wasting my time? Am low on money. Am making noodles. Am reading *Emma*. Am tired and will go to sleep. Am tired today and I feel like I may be getting a cold. Ambivalence gives you something to do, something to think about. Amelia has been working at the salon for fifteen years—since she was fifty-four. Amelia showed me how to shampoo, and I got water all over my skirt. Amelia would never ask a man to marry her, she said, turning away, and I felt really ashamed. Among other things we said to each other yesterday was that when I said I wouldn't cheat on him, Pavel said I couldn't cheat on him because if another man's dick got within one inch of my vagina, the relationship was over. An email from Lemons today about love and

friendship and attraction that said nothing. An ideal life would be to have several boyfriends or husbands at once. An inability to work as much as the energy inside me allows. An interest in a wide variety of people. An interest in doing research. An interest in sex. An interest in streetcar drivers. And already it has lost its charm. And as for Lemons, I feel deadly uninterested in being his friend or confiding in him ever. And at a certain point I will grow tired of writing like this, and that will be the end of mapping my insides. And basically the culture wants us not to grow up so we're like this all our lives. And cleaning the apartment was like cleaning up shop. And coffee. And *Crime and Punishment*, for sure. And don't think anymore about cocks going in and out. And don't use the word *sweetheart* with Pavel, whose name you still have to search for sometimes. And earlier, wondering what is wrong with me that I didn't give him a chance last summer, but by the end of the night remembering, for to have to hear him talk all the time, I would always be wanting him out of my apartment. And everything he said in his last letter was sincere. And everything I eat tastes like hospital food. And everything I know about a human life. And falling into men. And for God's sake, stop telling people like Lemons and Fiona about my relationship problems! And hard, dishonest, claustrophobic and destined to

doom as soon as I moved in with him. And he denies this, but I remember clearly that he said that I would meet the man of my dreams when I was thirty, and then I would stop writing. And here he was, so beautiful—more beautiful than in my memory of him, even the waitress couldn't keep her eyes off him, or the man who was sitting at the bar, but Lars is so pretty that he doesn't notice any of this. And how he looked at dinner, while we were talking. And how I am drawn to addicts. And how I am drawn to love like an addiction. And how I am happy about that. And how I am not sleeping enough. And how I am not working right now. And how I am working too hard. And how it was positioned inside me. And how little he understands about how much I feel for him. And how much that makes me want him! And I became happy. And I became very happy all of a sudden. And I cooked all day, first the carrots, then the fresh pesto I had picked up from the market. And I didn't want to tell him about my day. And I didn't. And I do have a feeling that he wants to destroy strong women, as he once said. And I imagined him with a wedding ring on his finger, and I suddenly got wet. And so the struggle will continue. And then he and I went to his apartment and fought and yelled at each other all night. And then talking to Rosa about him today, she pointed out that he has never treated me as someone he

wants to have a relationship with, but as someone he's really fond of that he likes fucking. And there is nothing more complicated to it than that. And there is nothing weak about this. And to know what humans are. And to live aloneish. And what is a bad person anyway? And you do things that are punishments to yourself, or things that harm you, or that are self-inflicted pain. Anyway, I am not crying about him, though several days ago I was. Anyway, later he cut a piece of bread for me. Anyway, who knows? Are we cowards if we choose the lesser honour? Are you going to war or are you drawing in an audience? Art changes the opinion of the masses, as much as science does. Art in other cultures, in cultures that were more concerned about the well-being of the group, had art that was not so concerned with inner psychology and one's isolated problems, but problems as they affected the tribe. Art is not essential, but love is essential, and maybe that is why people make art, to express their love of something—that tree, humans, the world, language, intensity of thought—and the person who doesn't respond to a work of art is perhaps missing the love of the thing which the artist is pointing to, lovingly. Art is too much a tool for ambition, and not even the ambition to make something beautiful—which, as I write it, seems exhausting, too—but just the personal ambition to rise above other people. Art, I

saw yesterday, is not a benign or pleasant, do-goodery thing to be doing, I don't know how I hadn't seen it before. As Claire dashes from the world of filmmaking, and Hanif dashes from the world of literature, and Pavel, who has never had a world, simply dashes about. As I write it, I know that this is just a moment of high confidence which will certainly pass. As if I could go down into the lobby and fuck anyone I found there. As Rosa said, *it only takes an afternoon to get pregnant*. As we approached the field from the forest. As we walked to the hotel through the street. As well, I was talking about the sadness of being oneself. Aside from that, life is really good right now. At last, the ambassador's wife came over, and she was like a second-rate first lady, and she had a very earnest way about her, and she spoke to the young man about how good it was for him to be in the foreign service, and he replied that after September 11th, it was the only thing he wanted to do, and she said that she was looking for some young genius to help her—and he perked up—and she said, *to help me with my computer*. At one point Fiona was like, *you're such a good listener*. At one point Rosa was talking about how she didn't like New York literary parties, because it was all forty-year-old men hitting on women in their twenties, and I turned to Lemons and said, *it's terrible, do you understand this?* and he gave me a sweet smile with a twist in his mouth. At one point Tom said, *this was Ted*

Hughes's room. At the beginning of the night, people were mostly talking with the people they came to the party with. At the end of the night, Lemons said, *well anyway, I just wanted to tell you about my dilemma*, but it wasn't a dilemma at all.

Back at his place, he showed me pictures of his ex-girlfriend, and I talked to him about Lars. Back home, I just lay in my room alone and masturbated, content with my mediocrity. Bad metaphor, humans as machines. Bah. Bakery in Berlin. Basically it's a crazy year, that's what Claire said, this is going to be a crazy year. *Be a pro*, Lemons said. Be a woman. *Be an individual*, he suggested. Be bald-faced and strange. Be calm. Be cautious with your money. Be clean and attractive. Be comfortable and assured and confident in your work life. *Be creative*, is what Pavel thinks people are told, and what is expected of a person, now more than ever. Be direct about the things you need that are reasonable requests, and apart from that, just enjoy him and your time together. Be impeccable with your word. Be miserable about the world. Be optimistic, for you know how steady application always gets you somewhere.

Be patient and hold on to your vision and integrity. Be peaceful, do little, find the one good thing, the one solace in the moment. Be thoughtful and wise. Be very quiet, very humble, very grateful. Be worse than you were when you were younger, and allow that to be a fact, that people around you will interact with less than common grace and decency, they will interrupt and disappoint one another, and they will not always behave as you would want—in that good way. Because another person is not a tool for your own self-development. Because as Claire was saying the other night, one's thoughts are always changing. Because *beauty* is a word reserved for art, and I'm not sure to what degree to consider this new book art. Because by the time I reach the computer to write, I've so exhausted my mind that the only thing I have the energy for is answering emails. Because for so long I've wondered if I'm not heartless to always be breaking up with men, or thinking about breaking up, but what if it's something else—what if it's a neurotic need to repeat the insecure feeling of things coming to an end? Because I am in debt and don't know how I'm going to live. Because I am not writing. Because I am sad. Because I am with a man. Because I couldn't leave, I tried to find the dinner party interesting, but I was unable to find anything interesting about Lemons's new girlfriend. Because I had love until this weekend, I didn't think money was important.

Because I had sex with Lars. Because I have zero dollars. Because I will probably ruin my life. Because I would get bored. Because I would leave. Because it is a pattern, and the pattern is: be with me, desire Laurel; be with Laurel, desire me. Because it would be better to write one really good story, like *Frankenstein* or something, just once, it doesn't have to be more than once, just come up with a really good story, probably a tragedy. Because it's emotion that makes something compelling, and I don't know to what extent to consider this new book emotional. Because it's the whole truth. Because Lars seems not neurotic, I feel like the things I do that might wound another man would drop off him. Because one is always falling in high heels, falling forwards. Because that's the sort of woman he wants, and that's not me. Because the money isn't here for nail polish, or lipsticks, so now that you have nail polish, now that you have lipsticks, now that you have this green skirt about which Pavel said, *keep it on*, then proceeded to fuck you in, stop spending money on such junk. Because the standards here are so low, my standards have also become low. Because there is no God to ask forgiveness from if we trespass religious laws, we must ask for forgiveness from each other for trespassing or failing to honour human laws. Been thinking about authenticity, and about how we have been done a great disservice by being taught that what we are to be authentic to is our feel-

ings, as opposed to our values. Before falling asleep, I was thinking about my fundamental insecurity in the world, and I wondered if it was possible for me to feel safe even for one minute. Before I boarded the plane, they made us sit for a long time in the suffocatingly hot bus. Before speaking to Rosa, I was reading a Leonard Cohen interview, and he said that the longer he lived, the more he understood that he was not in charge. Being a lazy wanderer with no mission is definitely an option. Being back in Toronto brought close the truth of how I felt being onstage with the band those two weeks, which was: very bad. Being high for the first time on tour, I saw how amazing it all was, how remarkable and new, and how interesting all these people I was travelling with were. Being onstage in front of a crowd that is screaming for you and applauding your name—this is not an experience I feel I need. Besides, there is nothing wrong with writing books that come out of an inner security, peace, watching, reflection. Best not to get too rosy-eyed about each other, so that when I return to him, we aren't disappointed. Best not to live too emotionally in the future—it hardly ever comes to pass. Better to be on the outside, where you have always been, all your life, even in school, nothing changes. Better to look outward than inward. Blow jobs and tenderness. Books that fall in between the cracks of all aspects of the human endeavour. Books that would express

this new philosophy, this somehow post-capitalist philosophy, or whatever it would be that could say, in the worldly sense, *be a loser*, and not with the religious faith that you will be rewarded for it later. Both of them were in important relationships, then they had a passionate affair, and now they're suddenly together. Both those meetings, though good for my books and my work, did not feel good for my soul or for my moral progress in the world. Bought a good spray for getting out stains because my overcoat had gotten stained with wine the night before, then I hung around on Adam Phillips's tidy London street and bought some hair elastics and arrived at his house a bit early. Bought a lot of clothes, make-up, spent a lot of money. Bought tea. Bought white shoes. Brunch with friends this weekend? Brunch with Lemons and Ida. Build a life together, step by step. Building a fireplace and being cozy. But after getting out of the car tonight, I realized that actually, with writing, I have something far more valuable than money. But also, there is no Platonic world. But any change is really hard and a real risk because it means not controlling the outcome; it means you don't know where you're going to end up, so if you're at all determined to get somewhere—to some fixed spot in the future—it's hard to let yourself change. But as I was saying this, I was realizing that my feeling about it was changing, and I saw that there was something fascinating about living

only one life, and in some ways there is a great privilege in getting to live only one life and not having to live any others. But I had some good pierogis anyway. But I just wanted to mark down that I am happy. But I mostly don't feel like I can spend much time with Pavel anymore, for he irritates me on a very deep level. But love can endure. But love is not enough. But love without compatibility is a constant pain. But my task is not to love him, but simply to love—to be a person who loves—so to love him as part of an overall loving, not at the exclusion of everyone else, with blinders on, focused only on him, but rather focused on the entire universe, for the universe is my first relationship, the fundamental one; then beyond that, to love all of creation, which includes the man I am with. But of course it was a joke. But the essential thing is to remain persevering in order not to deviate from the right path. But then I left and bought myself a round of cheese from the grocery store, and a Minute Maid and a bottle of water and some bread from the bakery—it was delicious—and I was so hungry that I drank the juice as soon as I got outside and I immediately felt better; but before, sitting in the restaurant when the woman wouldn't take my order and kept laying out knives, I had never been so irritable. But then I started to cry because I didn't want to start things up with him again. But this morning I am not worried about it, I do not care. Buy food

with Mom. Buying skin cream. By staying here, my world closes in. By the end, people around you will be dying off, and they will be thinking about their own deaths and the deaths of their partners so entirely that they won't have time to notice what you have accomplished, or how you managed to live such a faultless life, they're just going to be thinking about how their wife is dying, or how their husband has died, or about how there's nobody in the world who will love them as much or understand them so well, while you will be sitting here all alone with your great pride over the life you have crafted, and the work you have made, and everything you did to make yourself so perfect and good. By which I mean, not having children, being with the wrong man, having no love in the end, and being sort of penniless and maybe ignored.