

TRACTATUS LOGICO-EROTICUS

- 1 *The world is all that is the case.*
- 1.1 *The world is the totality of facts, not of things.*
- 1.2 At colloquium dinner a month ago I sat across the long table from you. It was the first time I had seen you outside of class. There were flames between us (three candles). Your face was an apparition perfected by flame-flicker, distance, and a little wine.
- 1.201 Your face flickered as though I had projected it.
- 1.21 In the near-darkness I saw shapes I hadn't seen before: hollows in your cheeks and throat, dimples, the cleft in your chin. Shadow-catchers. The contours of you.
- 1.3 I couldn't hear the conversation at your table end, only your laugh and isolated words that filled gaps in the speech of others between us. Once you said: "come back"; and, later: "will you be . . . this time . . . enormously . . . beyond me?"
- 1.31 Your voice was distinguishable by a bounce in the vowels and a ring in the consonants. Irish, ironed at Oxford. You sat compactly in the chair, upright or slightly forward, alert; you did not lean back. Your arms did not stray far. When you smiled, your lips did not let go of each other.
- 1.4 These facts that make up our outward selves, gestures seen from a distance by any stranger, words overheard in a context we did not make (dim light, or loneliness)—these facts that are most objective, we are unaware of; but they are what will suddenly cause another person to love us.

- 2 *What is the case—a fact—is the existence of states of affairs.*
- 2.011 *It is essential to things that they should be possible constituents of states of affairs.*
- 2.0121 *If things can occur in states of affairs, this possibility must be in them from the beginning.*
- 2.02 The first day of class, as you were leaving for campus, you dropped a large box of styrofoam packing peanuts that you were carrying down the stairs of your apartment building. The box opened as it fell, spewing many times its volume of peanuts, styrofoam snowdrifts and landslides to hear you tell it—the box tumbled one flight and landed solidly, but the peanuts floated, over the banister, up stairs, down halls, out the front door, onto the ledge of the second floor window, which was just beyond your reach, even leaping.
- 2.021 You picked them all up, though it made you twenty minutes late for the first meeting of our seminar.
- 2.0211 The tyranny of time versus the catastrophe of disorder: duty versus aesthetics: one cannot leave styrofoam packing peanuts in one's wake.
- 2.0212 I picture you thinking: Time ought to pause. That would be the proper thing, for time to wait politely until the dropping was undone, an accommodation for its not allowing things to be undone by going back and getting them right on another try.
- 2.022 As we waited in the seminar room, we discussed regulations concerning the lateness of professors, which none of the graduate students quite knew: was it half an hour for professors with tenure, a quarter hour for those without?
- 2.023 I loved the airy fidgets of your fingers describing styrofoam peanuts—your hands were impatient with weightlessness, with things lighter than the air disturbed as one approached to capture them. I

loved your confidence that the outcome of this moral choice—us, or the peanuts—was self-evident. I loved the flakes of styrofoam static-clung to the back of your sweater, precariously quivering at the vigorous motions of your chalk on the blackboard.

2.0272 *The configuration of objects produces states of affairs.*

2.1 In class, you seemed most comfortable looking at the person furthest from you. So that was the seat I chose. In class I was permitted, even expected, to watch you the entire time.

2.2 When we began our study of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, you said you had seen it for the first time in a bookstore when you were only fifteen. The strangeness of its form sent shivers down your spine: its look on the page, the orderliness of the numbers, the spareness and prophetic authority of its sentences. German and English stared across the pages seeming to translate each other, but also seemed to need yet another translation before you could know what was *meant*.

2.21 You bought the book, knowing nothing more about it. You said you were convinced it held mystical secrets, and read it like an apprentice combing a master alchemist's journal for experiments the master pursued late into the night without him, the deeper mysteries that did not permit a young and ignorant witness.

2.211 “But when I was fifteen I also saw ghosts and had telepathy,” you said. “I wanted everything to be more than it is.”

2.212 I was jealous of everyone who heard you say this. They would all love you, they must. And of the slim red book you held, that you spoke to so fondly, and of my dead rival who made you shiver, Mr. Wittgenstein.

2.3 Frequently, while you met with other students in office hours, I was outside the cracked door pretending to wait for you.

- 2.301 I didn't think of listening at your door as eavesdropping. It was more like attending a rehearsal, sitting in the back of the auditorium while Horowitz practiced.
- 2.31 "Oh well," an undergraduate too easily, too cheerily excused her late paper, "things happen." "No, Susan," you replied sternly. "Shit happens. *Things* fall apart." A certain weariness in your voice implied a regret, even as you spoke, that the remark would be wasted on her.
- 2.32 As I heard the rustle of gathering up from inside, I would look anxiously at my watch, shaking my head, and walk off quickly towards another appointment for which I was, apparently, already late.
- 3 *A logical picture of facts is a thought.*
- 3.0001 "*A state of affairs is thinkable*": *what this means is that we can picture it to ourselves.*
- 3.01 I had assumed, at the beginning, that nothing more would be possible. I had always given others this advice, in full confidence. Such things were not even . . .
- 3.011 Consider the language in which I had expressed my objections: professor, student, authority, evaluation: you are none of these categories. You are an airy thing, a small thing, a tight thing, a quick thing, a thing in a building with a light on at 4 A.M., predictable and then unpredictable, speaking and then silent, stopping to think with your lips just slightly parted, taking questions like a hungry chipmunk that must take a chunk of bread from a boy's hand, approaching shyly then scurrying off with the bread to a safe distance, eating rapidly, and coming back, not as shyly, for more. You are a thing that wanders this town like a sparkler.
- 3.1 *In a proposition a thought finds an expression that can be perceived by the senses.*

3.11 One day I passed you in the hall deep in discussion with a visiting speaker. He asked where he might find a cup of coffee. You suggested the student center café, and said you would take him there.

3.12 I went to your office; the door was unlocked. The sweater you had worn in class that day was lying over the back of your chair. It was very soft, not like wool but like fur, a dark maroon with buttons down the front. I put my hand through the sleeve and stroked it, and kissed it. I kissed the ribbed neck, then the front, each hard little button, outside and inside, filling the sweater with a mass of kisses like soap bubbles that would pop and disappear when touched, leaving a film of kisses where your body would be.

3.2 Your friend Mr. Wittgenstein said, in another place: “A philosophical problem has the form: ‘I don’t know my way about’.” Where in this did I get lost?

3.3 Last night I lay in bed imagining that I had cooked dinner for you. We ate and drank wine, and then we argued; I was jealous of another student that you, that everyone, thought beautiful. It was a pointless argument, but I persisted, questioning you on the nature of thinking someone beautiful, was attraction necessarily involved, circling all the things I was afraid of, until finally you were so angry that you hit the table and a wine glass toppled and broke. Then you were gone. The imagination ended, but my pulse stayed hard and fast. I was holding my breath, almost crying. It was our argument that caused this, your anger that I still experienced an hour later as I lay awake with my eyes open, even knowing that you knew nothing of this, you didn’t scream at me or break the glass—

3.31 I still know what has happened, and what has not yet happened. I can remind myself. But my experience of merely possible events has taken on the greater intensity.

4.023 *A proposition must restrict reality to two alternatives: yes or no.*

- 4.031 *In a proposition a situation is, as it were, constructed by way of argument.*
- 4.1 After colloquium dinner last week it was suggested that we all go to a movie. Some of us said yes, some said no, most said maybe; we would meet at a theater downtown in half an hour.
- 4.2 I arrived at the theater first, exactly on time. You were ten minutes late. We chatted cheerfully and easily in the presence of the others' expected arrival. The longer we waited, the less we said.
- 4.21 When the movie was about to start you suggested we give up and leave; the others weren't coming. I asked if you wanted to see the movie. You said yes. We laughed about this, but stood outside waiting even after the film had begun.
- 4.3 Late in the movie, we leaned into each other; not in one motion but slowly, at first imperceptibly, until finally our shoulders met and lightly pressed. Through the fabric of my shirt I felt a gentle, growing warmth. We leaned through the credits, until the pointing finger of the house lights intruded. When we moved apart, that spot was still warm. All the blood in my body had rushed there, to pass through and spread that closeness to you everywhere inside me.
- 5.135 *There is no possible way of making an inference from the existence of one situation to the existence of another, entirely different situation.*
- 5.1361 *We cannot infer the events of the future from those of the present.*
- 5.2 Touch can be accidental. You may not have felt me, you may have noticed only the movie. Or maybe you felt my arm but stayed as you were because you were comfortable. Maybe you pretended the arm belonged to someone else, to an actress in the movie, or to a man you saw once in the supermarket and would never have approached.
- 5.21 You may simply have been cold. But you were not shivering.

- 5.3 In fact the way we sat, each of us huddled against our shared armrest, leaving inches of empty seat on the opposite side, made the people on either side of us seem much further than inches away. It seemed as though those people were not present at all: they were not with us. We were with each other.
- 5.4 After the movie, I walked to my car. You walked to your car. We both drove off. In my apartment I paced as though something was on its way, propelled by the energy of my steps. I went outside, to take longer steps.
- 5.41 I walked the two miles to campus. It was cloudy and a wind came up; it started to rain. Your office window was dark. That dark window made the campus completely empty.
- 5.5 It was five days until the next class. I waited with Tuesday's class so much in my mind that days before, it already seemed a solid place—you at one end of the oval table, the book-lined walls of the seminar room behind you, the shelves of books so familiar to me from years of browsing that I could see each title on the spine, and I could see inside the books as well, the frontispiece, random pages, so that the scene took on a surreal, a portentous clarity.
- 5.51 Tuesday came. We entered the room, and left it again, two hours later.
- 5.6 That you might feel as I do, seems to me impossible. That you might not, is unthinkable: because that world would not be the same as this one. And so I have decided, I must proceed as though this is not merely thinkable, but possible. But what can I do?
- 5.61 Just as there are no love potions, there are no love arguments: there are no deductions from which love follows as a necessary conclusion.
- 5.62 And yet, the feeling in me believes that if it tells you enough it will pass itself on to you. No matter that we know differently, even

that saying what you feel is not possible. It has come to believe that these are not just words but word-feelings, not an account of the facts of my feelings but particles lightly fixed to this page, floating things light as dust that might encounter you directly.

5.631 *If I wrote a book called The World as I Found It, I should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not. . . .*

6 *This is the general form of a proposition.*

6.01 What do you think about when you drive home at night, and the moon is rising, the late gibbous moon coming up through trees which only just dropped their leaves, so that you can still smell them, a brown, crackly smell, and hear their dry crunch under the tires; what do you think of, then?

6.02 Some unnoticed number of hours ago the moon rose, just as I said, orange and a little off balance. Now and then small clouds pass it in the sky and make the trees disappear; only with the moon behind them can I see the branches.

6.021 As the moon gets higher it watches the progress of these pages. They were written by candlelight, as they are delicate. Your life must have secrets. Doesn't it? Yes, it must.

6.1 The entrance to my apartment is through a covered porch. On the porch, tomorrow night, will be a candle burning in a clear, cut-glass vase. If you would come in, pick up the candle and carry it inside. I will wait in darkness, as I don't wish to see other objects. Ordinary things like my teacup do not annoy me but my books and papers, which are everywhere, have become intolerable. I do not wish to see words. Reading even a sentence or two creates an impression that another mind is present, a companion to my thoughts, and I am sick of the illusion; I can touch the page, but no one else is there.

6.2 If you will not come in, then blow out the candle, and quickly
leave. Do not speak. Do not explain or apologize.

6.21 We will agree that a capricious wind extinguished the flame.

7 *What we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence.*

Italicized lines are from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, with their original numberings. The translation is by D.F. Pears & B.F. McGuinness.