

Jenny Bouilly

from *The Book of Beginnings and Endings*

What the reader desires, perhaps even more than the author, is to possess only one character to love. There are, although we sometimes do not believe it and are indeed out and about walking and crying and cursing in the rain because of it, those of us who wish to expend our emotion on solely one affair, one devotee. What the author most wishes to give but sometimes is unable to furnish: one love to be loved beyond others. Of course, we cannot imagine what fears must hold us back, what keeps us clinging to our bed sheets when we are wide-awake in the dark when everyone else has long since slumbered past the point of dreaming. (Does love then forever estrange us? Keep us from participating in the simplest of collective human activities?) What helps us to sleep: sometimes a book. What keeps us awake: our devotion. Our devotee is oftentimes a character and at other times an author, because sometimes it isn't so much a character that we love but the author that we are utterly devoted to. How then to address the letter? What a pitying fact that stamps are no longer licked. A redemption that envelopes have remained somewhat simple. Disappointing that ink barrels for your fountain pen are difficult to find, especially in your most favorite colors. The expression of love, always premeditated, must contain ceremony, must attune to a certain degree of elegance and reverence. After all, like other rites of passage, it occurs only once. Out of the many characters in this novel, out of the numerous characters carrying out their daily deeds, succumbing to their existential chores, there is only one that I long to eavesdrop on, only one that I desire to spy, only one that sits in wait for a report from the author, and sometimes indeed I am ambushed. A certain train stop keeps me from continuing. A visitor has come between us. My appetites and bodily desires must be attuned to before I can continue my affair. How many nights has my bedroom light been on and then from the street, some passerby thinks I've turned it off to begin some act of love when really, it's due to my . . .

... recent incarnation was a video cassette claiming to be a movie about death. I learned about this movie through a postcard I received in the mail, saying that the cassette was available for purchase. For \$135, I could see how death was equipped with wings. The idea seemed rather beautiful to me, and I was depressed that I had not thought of it myself. (Even if I had happened upon this thought, however, I lacked the skills and know-how with which to transform this metaphor into film.) I could not even afford the rental price of \$75. All I could do was tell others about this flyer, how I wanted very much to view this film, how I believed that the film would in some way heal me. No one believed me; no one believed that such a film existed. There was no way to prove the existence of the film to anyone, seeing as how I had discarded the advertisement. I can still visualize the colors of the postcard: a creamy peach background that illuminated a semi-nude man bearing enormous white (the white of eggshells in early morning light) wings. As soon as I forgot about the film, an identical postcard advertisement would end up in my mailbox. As I could never afford the film, I continued to discard the mailings. Only later, much later, several states and addresses later, did I realize that the reason why no one else had seen the flyer or heard of the film was because the film was manufactured especially *for me*, was in fact, trying desperately to enter my life. If the film had a filmmaker, then the filmmaker was long since gone from this world. If the film had a cast and crew, then they were hidden and among my daily scenery. Death equipped with wings. Such a lovely lovely thought that even without having viewed the film, I had in some way seen it.