

Not so dear Jenny:

We sew a knot
To hold the thing
That's *dear* to us.
Ropes that lashed
Your trunk to the mast,
Cord that fastened
Your briefcase to the bicycle,
Thread at the end of the seam
Down the back of my dress.
Eleven letters to confess
Your love. Three more
To negate it.
Not so, dear Jenny,
Not so.
That knot.
Our fear,
So dear,
Is its undoing.

But we two can never divorce each other.

The longing to marry your father,
Expressed in two languages,
Doubles the feeling.
The ocean between you
Elongates the longing.
As a child I wanted to go
To the pyramids, to Egypt, to outer space.
Without knowing I was waiting,
I waited & waited.
There was no proposal.
He married someone else.
Someone who smiled a lot
Whose scorn was palpable.
When he died, she vanished.
Every time he said, *We two
Can never divorce each other,*
I wanted to leave him.
Every time he said, *We two
Can never divorce each other,*
I wanted to stay with him forever.
I looked for someone else to marry.
I developed a fondness for people
Who pretended to be my father.
It was a very exciting time.
Some of my best fathers were women.
In the end I married a replica of my sister.
If he wasn't going to marry me,
I wasn't going to marry him either.
Every night, I sleep
In the arms of my child
While he sleeps in his grave.
But we two can never divorce each other.

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I never read one word Toni Morrison wrote.

There are many ways to love a person.

In 1993, he wrote the words “*Toni*” & “*Morrison*” in a letter to me.

I was at a residency.

The same prize that ennobled her enabled him to see twelve letters differently.

The word “Nobel,” so noble it kept ringing in his ears.

Years before the prize, before her nobility in the world’s eyes, my father was the person
who heard the name “Toni Morrison” & asked, “Who’s he?”

He never read one word Toni Morrison wrote.

After the prize, he *never* did either.

But the words “*Toni*” & “*Morrison*” entered his lexicon.

He flexed the seventeen muscles in his hand to make twelve letters of the English
alphabet occur in a particular sequence.

Her name became our cryptonym, a silent hymn we wrote to signal allegiance, a
code we sent back & forth during a war that was otherwise raging.

I was living alone in the woods of Texas.

Walking the red dirt roads so reminiscent of past wars, people stared at me as if *I* were
the enemy.

Most had only seen a face like mine on TV.

One man had seen me, years before, in a jungle.

I was a trigger for the time he pulled a trigger & *I* died.

There are many ways to kill a person.

At the nearest store, *I* asked for tortillas.

None of the clerks knew what they were.

Texas is big enough to hold most of Vietnam, Cambodia and a large chunk of Thailand. There
are many ways to live there.

I went back to the cabin & *wrote Toni Morrison* a letter.

Imagine the hundreds of young women living in dangerous territories who must have
done the same.

An army of us writing to her, asking: What are the possibilities for me, behind
all these trees?

There are many ways to ask a question.

One day, her name in his envelope, written in his ink, came back to me.

There are many ways to answer.

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