

## Creation

### October 12, 1998

A single yellow rose, a small bud, from a climbing rose in a wooden planter. The planter is half-rotten from almost seven years of watering. I cut the rose with my pruning shear<sup>s</sup>, and place it in a vase on my window sill, an attempt at hope, to start my writing day.

The rose bush, a birthday present from friends in the running club, needs planting in the ground. Yet all these years, from apartment balcony to house patio, I have kept it alive, in its narrow space, through so much arid weather.

I'm good at keeping plants alive under difficult conditions.

I have put today aside, driven by the anxiety of these last two weeks, as if I have nothing else to turn to but writing.

Yesterday, on the edge with myself, crying over the kitchen sink: a tiny bone fracture prevents me from running; a plateau in my professional life leaves me despairing in empty space; and lack of physical conception leaves me feeling hollow. (But I fantasize, hopelessly, that my breasts are getting bigger, that my stomach swells, that my mood comes from a new combination of hormones.)

My desire for a physical pregnancy—and the lack of it—has become a symbol right now of my life. I am not birthing anything.

Even reading is hard now. I have eight books open, only partly read: a self-help book, a book on writing, a book on investing, a book on publishing, a book on health, two novels and an autobiography. Yet nothing is complete, or even rolling along.

I am between stations, neither getting on nor getting off. Simply going around and around the Inner Circle.

I know the signs: the breaking into tears, the sense of hopelessness, of not making a difference.

I am in a little crisis.

In general, I know what I need, but in specifics, I'm floundering, not knowing what I should do.

I come to this place several times in my life. And each time, I battle the family inheritance.

It's the worst place.

It's where I saw my mother crumple at the kitchen table, smoking her Woodbine cigarettes, obsessively spinning the same tales, the gist of which is that someone else should bring salvation to her door.

I have inherited this point of view. No matter what my head says, it's in my emotions.

I didn't grow up learning ways to fix or solve problems. I wasn't taught choices. What something else was there that any of us could possibly have the strength to reach?

That was the atmosphere I swam in.

Where I lived, people crumpled under pressure. People cried, smoked, vented, blamed, paid back, hit out, drank, disappeared into TVs, into bed, into food, under bed covers, into meaningless

books, into page 3 of the Daily Mirror, into chocolate-covered digestive biscuits, into toast and jam, into anything but creative transformation.

As a kid, I would try. I would clean out flower beds by tearing out weeds that were strangling each other. But I had nothing to put into the beds. They remained black oblongs of mud until the weeds came back for their warring.

In my house, no one felt capable of completing anything. The father started projects that were never completed: a half-painted bookcase, a hole dug but never filled. Windows remained broken. Faucets always leaked. Nothing ever was fixed.

The mother coped with survival: the basics of food, bills. Nothing left over for anything that could possibly go beyond that.

No wonder, then, that whenever I now hit an obstacle, it appears like a wall with a height and width that go on forever. No wonder I buckle, fall weeping over sinks. No wonder I am first overwhelmed with "I can't."

What I envy--and sometimes resent—in others are their family inheritances, laden with "I can's."

Don't tell me that we all struggle to the same degree. Don't tell me that everyone has the same opportunities for success. Don't tell me that we all have our crosses to bear.

Some of us have not only the obstacles, but also the lessons we were never taught. For some, it's tougher.

You don't know if you've never been there. You have no idea.