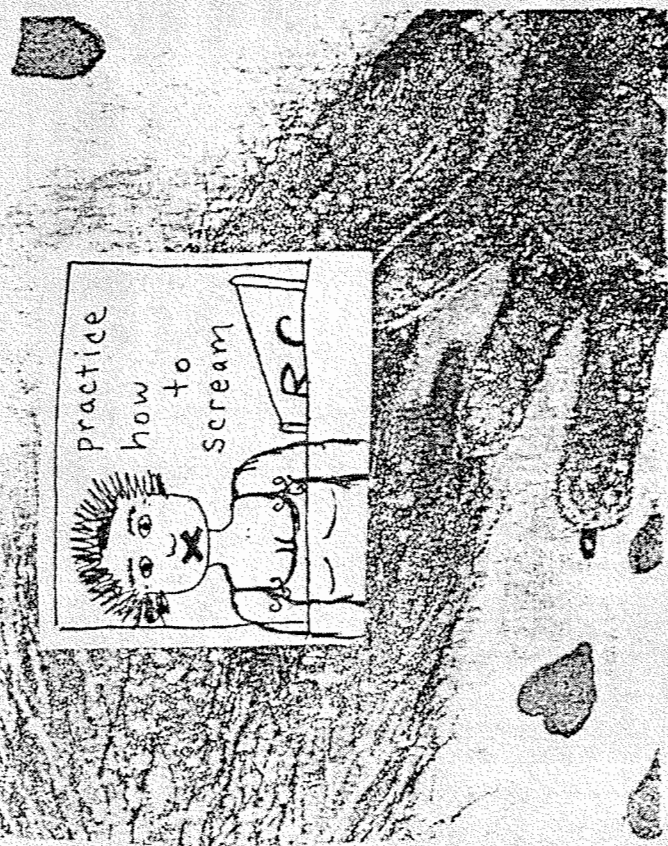


on the table

my sexual assaults



HARRASSMENT!

I know what your ASS meant
and that's HARRASSMENT
P-U-S-S-Y

Forget for a moment

what's between my thighs

T-I-T-T-Y

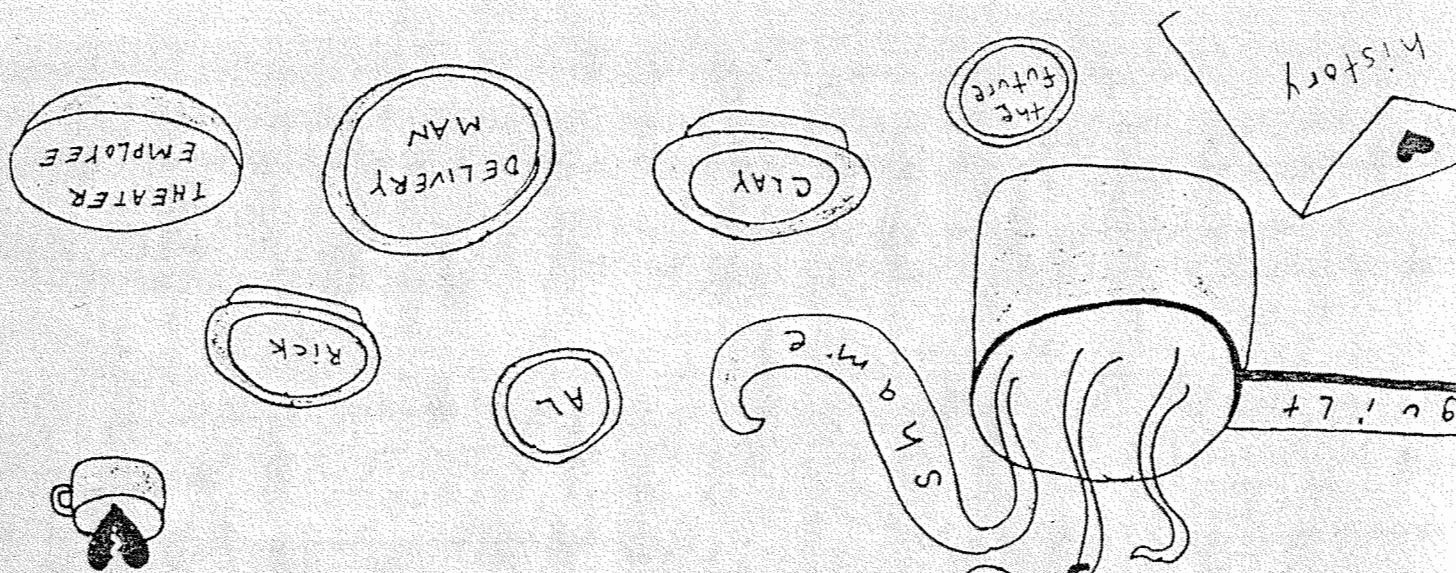
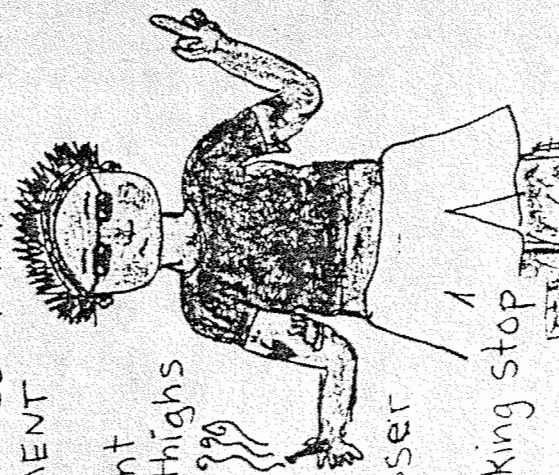
that ain't no alibi

You UGLY!

You ugly mr. harasser

You UGLY!

and you better fucking stop



i remember every fucking moment
and perhaps, somehow, i am a bit too soft.
or a bit too grateful: i have not been raped by most definitions,
and i lie in waiting for it to happen, because by all statistics it will
and i carry this anticipation with me to the post office, the beach,
sexual assault defines my past but also my future. the bedroom.
sexual assault is not some hidden memory to be dug up in therapy. it is
continual, open, present, because my list is always
expanding. anything might make me suddenly remember that thing i
blocked out from when i was seven. today might make me come to terms with
deciding my last partner was abusive, at the same time i
hear that partner's name exalted.
intimacy is complicated. intimacy is dangerous.
and i have named assault and abuse so many other things--
love sex friendship just a part of the job
patriarchy clamping down on me for being in the wrong place in the wrong dress.

postscript--

I wrote this one morning, typing non-stop for hours, until the stories ended,
keeping Waffle from sleeping in, but this is for you, Waff.

thank you for opening this place.

I thought I would lay all my incidences out, on the table, but I can't
keep going with them. maybe i'm not ready yet to give away everything.

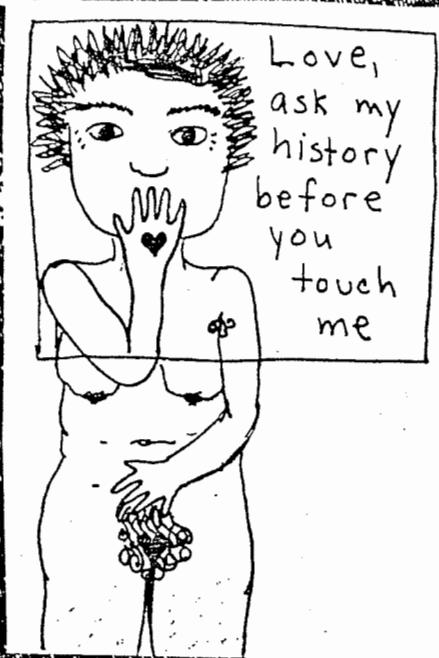
Share your stories if you want for # 2, anonymous is cool.

every abuse is my abuse send to: mel, villa de la vulva,

G S. B St, Lake Worth, FL, 33460.

mmalfa@pobox.com

everything around me screams silence.



everything around me screams submit.

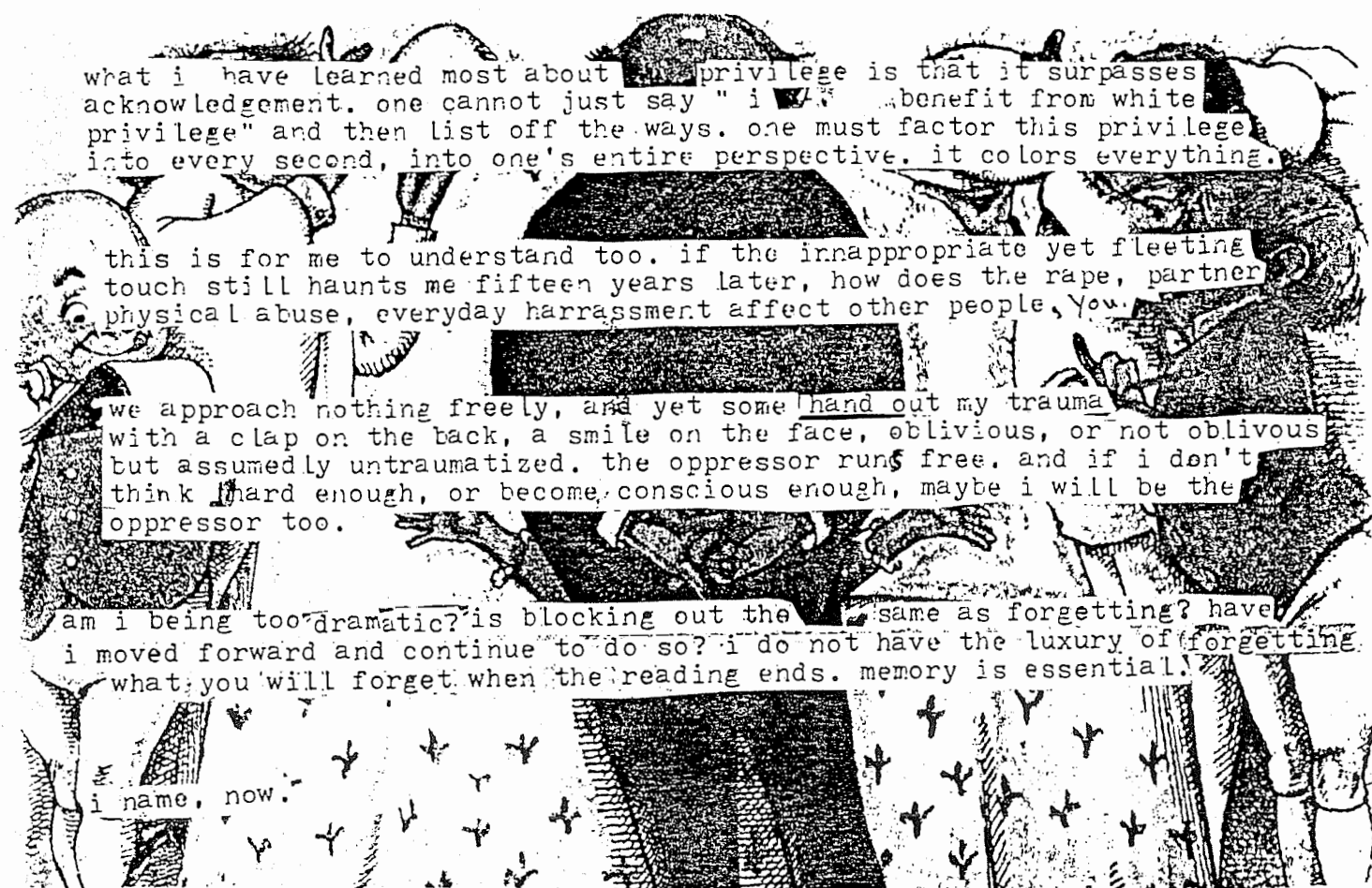
the dark is equally a place to find love and a place to remember everything. but it's not even the dark, it's even more haunting when it happened in daylight. while other people watched.

i used to think these things were not important, because i bear no visible bruises or scars, because i have nothing to write on a police form, because 'wrong' falls to pieces in a normal world where abuse signifies affection, because my mother would not understand.

in my radical world i want no tolerance, but i have not even given you my list, the list i tally every few days, more important than the one where i count my lovers, if only for checking sexual disease.

no more. i am putting my dishes on the table, no matter how small, meager, paltry, weak in your eyes. in my eyes, my body, my life, they outshine all the other courses, they break and fly at me, blocking my view, when i turn a corner, reach for a kiss, trust.

i want you to know this so you, too, can begin to remember.
i want you to know this so you can understand where i come from
and where so many other people, maybe everyone, comes from.
i do not know because i have not been asking, inviting in your stories



what i have learned most about the privilege is that it surpasses acknowledgement. one cannot just say "i benefit from white privilege" and then list off the ways. one must factor this privilege into every second, into one's entire perspective. it colors everything.

this is for me to understand too. if the inappropriate yet fleeting touch still haunts me fifteen years later, how does the rape, partner physical abuse, everyday harrasment affect other people, You.

we approach nothing freely, and yet some hand out my trauma with a clap on the back, a smile on the face, oblivious, or not oblivious but assumedly untraumatized. the oppressor runs free. and if i don't think hard enough, or become conscious enough, maybe i will be the oppressor too.

am i being too dramatic? is blocking out the same as forgetting? have i moved forward and continue to do so? i do not have the luxury of forgetting what you will forget when the reading ends. memory is essential.

i name, now.

while i tried to work out a plan of escape in my head that would not make my lover's best friend hate me and would not reject him, clay was all over me and we were backed against the wall hanging and then up the stairs and into his bed. i was still trying to figure out how to say no. i had never said no to a sexual advance, ever in my life. hadn't i brought this on? sometimes i have to practice screaming, even now, because i can't fathom how to do it. in the past, things could never get this far because i was in a public space or i could deflect an advance-- but never 'no.' sure, i had yelled in my feminism classes and even done some radical cheering, but i was mute, and still, being fucked in clay's bed, where he had to ask me to smile and to touch him, and eventually asked me to moan, which i did dutifully, and he commended my acting. we said nothing of damien.

it was sooooo physically painful,

and i cried whenever we changed positions and i faced away. there was no lubricant, but at least a condom, or several, and i held my breath and worked out plans of escape but halfway through the night i realized-- i would never work up the courage and it was only a few hours left till this morning and i could surely escape then. just wait it out. ouch. fuck, hurts.

that hurt. the next morning i told him i wanted to visit my sister in gainesville and i left and never called him or talked to him again until that year later when damien was back in town. i have visited damien twice since then over the years, where i hang out with both of them all day and fuck damien all night, sometimes. and he doesn't call me anything anymore.

THEN THE RAIN
WAS

clay called every night for a week and made me laugh and begged me to visit and he would teach me to surf. i thought of damien, how he had called me 'sweetness', all our long talks all those nights walking my dog, the way he had pulled me onto the bed the first time we made love, our long comfortable silences smiling at each other across the table at the hospital cafeteria. i had fucked up, but i could at least go hang with his oldest friend, try to smush my way back into his life.

i made the drive up to orlando, but ran into some detour which stalled me two hours. it was late by the time i arrived and the plan was to sleep over and in the morning we'd head to the beach. this was okay, because it was damien's old apartment, and damien still had a room with a bed in it, and i looked forward to sleeping there. i really should not have driven, because i had some major sleeping problems like narcolepsy but didn't know it yet.

clay was more awkward in person than he had been on the phone, and immediately started pouring me drinks. i barely said anything. most of damien's things had been removed from the apartment. i wanted to go to sleep; i didn't know how to express this or take control of the situation. i think i realized, to my horror, very soon, that clay's intentions were so far from what my silly head had envisioned them to be. once again so fucking naive.

and

it was only a couple of years ago that i first started saying no.

it did not become an easy trend.



i tried it out and felt shitty for months, giving in easier to others after that. i have been trained to be nice at all costs, a nice girl, someone who is helpful and loving and accomadating. perhaps i should have escaped my upbringing by now, but, again, it doesn't go away. i revert to what i know intimately when i am afraid, and yes spills out, or nothing spills out, where a radical cheer should have exploded.

in the projector room of the old, dilapidated and theater, my third film festival, i think.

i am really working box office all week, becoming friendly with the employees in trade for free coke and popcorn but sometimes i run up there to check on something or find someone. we have set up camp, as in boxes and boxes of prints and videos, in one corner of the huge second story corridor running lengthwise along the theater, where several projectors winked slowly along and only one person ran all of them, carefully timed.

i am, as usual, one of the only women working at the film festival. there seems to be no end to boy volunteers, and i dutifully coordinate them into slots. somehow my main job at the film festival, besides time and hard work, is to flirt. smile. make people happy. host the visiting filmmakers (boys) and visiting lecturers (boys) and patrons and judges and make them feel welcome. this is not asked of me explicitly, of course, so perhaps it is just in my nature to feel this has to be done. in any case by the end of the week, of literally 24-hours of smiling through films and parties and after-parties, i am fucking tired. but somehow i end up in this projector room alone, completely alone, in dim light, and the really big employee, the huge employee actually, has followed me up here.

he is smiling, so of course i am smiling too, even when he corners me between two projectors and presses his body against me, his face into my neck. his arms hold mine against the wall and he grins as if this is the greatest joke.

when i left orlando and moved home after college, my lover damien moved to LA.

i was sad, and we wrote fairly often, but by the time he was back in orlando for christmas, i was really depressed and really ashamed at having done nothing since i last saw him, working a dumb job as a secretary. i couldn't fathom visiting him, as much as i missed him, and we talked on the phone while my sister gave me the evil eye. it would be unacceptable to abandon her alone with my parents to visit a lover. in any case, i fucked up and felt shitty about it. damien returned to LA and i wouldn't get to see him for an entire year after that, unless i visited him, which he tactfully did not suggest.

a little after new year's, damien's best friend and old roommate began calling me. we had spoken a few times of course since i used to hang out at their house. he was the complete opposite of damien, a typical frat boy in every way possible, but they were childhood friends and had picked up a few of each other's mannerisms. i fancied damien had told clay to call me, hang out with me, take care of me somehow. i was his best friend's old girlfriend, or old lover, or old friend, right?

i learned, apparently, it wasn't love, because he just as easily tried to start a tryst with me, grabbing my breasts and kissing me-- yuch!!!!!! he has lips like my father!!!!--- and

pressing my hands against his pants. moaning stupid stuff about how he wanted me. i muttered something about him wanting his lover, not me, and tidily exited his mercedes. i felt like a fool for not seeing this coming, and i avoided hanging out with him, not too hard to do.

i still feel guilty though, that he might die and not have any friends or not have anyone to share his secrets with, which i know is a ridiculous thought, but oh well. sometimes i wonder when i will receive the invite to his funeral and if i will carry out his last will instructions to me, to find the secret ring and toss it into his coffin, putting it on his penis if possible. he once helped a student of his find an abortion doctor, when it was illegal, and paid for it.

i can feel his erection. of course. and i keep grinning too because, well, hell, i can hear the audience, my audience, laugh below me through the open window where the image shoots through and i know it would be bad to scream. disruptive. jason, the director, would be mad at me, and i probably fear him hating me, even more than he already does, more than anything else. it is very clear to me that being held down and groped is better than being held down and raped, and resistance physically, is indeed, futile, and my pushes away from him and to him, pushes into him and for more. my smile never leaves my face. and i really can't remember how i got out of the situation, that it was under 5 minutes long, that by smiling and flirting i could pretend to run down the stairs coquettishly instead of out of fear.

maintain safety

maintain safety is my mantra, and avoid rape is what sticks to me, instead of what i know now: avoid trauma, avoid assault, avoid men.

there is no such thing as harmless.

but i am avoiding thinking about all this, concentrating on work. only a couple more days till the festival is over and so i wait it out, avoiding the projector room, ceasing conversation with employee without making him suspicious or wrathful, because i still work the box office with his girlfriend. i tell someone, maybe, a boy volunteer who brushes it off of no concern. a year later we return to the same theater to do the same thing and i merely hope the employee no longer works there.

lucky for me, he doesn't.

in my bosses office, in college, information technology department, rollins college.

my first on-the-books job, an easy one, a student job. my bosses here are women who become my friends and empower me. i am fairly silent, though, and private, because i am sleeping with my ten years-older boss at the film festival, where i spend every evening working for him and every night fucking him, but not even our co-workers know and jason refuses to speak of our relationship, or that is how i remember it. i am crazy in love with him, and he tolerates this condition in exchange for sex and hard work. he calls me his worker bee, but never his girlfriend. it is anna's office, where i have become her personal assistant, holder of credit card numbers and secretly given a key to the building and a huge stash of laptops, one which i eventually, accidentally, steal (for the film festival of course, productively).

He, whose name i can't remember, is notoriously a flirt on campus. he is the delivery guy, so he knows everyone on campus, and comes by nearly everyday with some type of package. we are always ordering something or sending something out in the dramatic world of "i need my computer, now!" and he is responsible for the happiness of our department. Anna does him special favors, like deeming him nice equipment, to make sure our packages are delivered in a timely manner, our rush orders go through, or that red tape is pulled when we need it to be. so of course i am very nice to him and i flirt accordingly, like all the secretaries and other ladies, he makes his rounds to on campus.

i think i spent new years eve one year with al, his wife, his lover, his lover's 2 little kids, and me. his wife adored me, his lover made me cashew pate and drove me home in her rolls-royce, getting mad at al for calling me honey. she had a son my age who suspected everything (her husband was mostly away on long medical trips) and i fantasized about meeting the son. why wasn't i the son's friend instead of the secret lover's friend? it was all too romantic and weird of a situation for me to resist being involved in.

eventually al's lover stopped putting out, she was breaking their hearts for the sake of the kids, and al was afraid he would die before they could ever be together. we continued our lunches as i'm a sucker for sushi, and al had a secret cell phone i could always call him on if i needed anything--a ride, money, dinner. the guise of volunteering had fallen through and i gloated my friendship to jason the director and now my ex who had taken up with the blond bombshell who had modeled for our poster that year. it burned me up, i told everyone, and al made our goodbye hugs longer.

how could i forget about al.

FILM MAKERS

all these incidents played themselves out in the same time period forme. my college years, my film festival days. al was my volunteer, but also a 70+ very handsome and very intelligent man. charming, kind, liberal, he had an impressive resume as a journalist, like covering all of the racial integration of the South for a major news network, inventing how to film football games, or being there when NOW was formed. somehow volunteering turned into friendship, and he would take me out to eat at expensive restaurants in exchange for me listening to him.

somenow i became his

confidante. married for ten years to a very nice woman who grew orchids but refused to consummate the marriage, he was in love for the first time in a long time, with a woman twenty-five-years younger. he had told no one of his affair but me, and i was thrilled to have this peek into another person's life and flattered to be chosen as the holder of his secrets. i still, i think, am the only person in the world who knows where he keeps a ring she gave him and documents of their passion, which i have instructions of what to do with when he dies.

this story is more sad than anything, because i felt we were pretty good friends, him sharing so much with me and all, and besides the obvious age difference--i being practically a child to him, he was a fatherly figure to me who gave me good advice on my life and especially was encouraging of my activism and work. i trusted him implicitly and enjoyed the relationship because it seemed so safe--he was having an affair! he was in love! i was like a daughter to him. but i should have seen it coming, right?

it is sort of an joke, what a flirt he is, because his well-liked wife works in a different department on the other side of the campus. human resources, i think, although i only saw her once, and guiltily. He can trap me for long periods of time in empty hallways where i am constantly leading him to drop off boxes, the office where anna leaves me alone so often and the door shuts and locks. we inhabit a makeshift department, the wide dusty empty halls of the huge unweildy science building, whose only windows exist on occassional corners and the very top, always locked, floor. god, i remember having to take him through a million empty elevators, the loud scary basement, groping for the lightswitches. certainly a million places for him to have grabbed me.

he had taken to...kissing me. kissing me on the lips.

it wasn't like my italian neighbors who kissed every woman directly on the lips because he certainly, that i had seen, kept this to me. i would be on the phone, he would step in and kiss me. i would be avoiding his eyes, towards the end, trying to work on something or shuffle paper and he would lean over and kiss me.

i told my film festival volunteer friend, a boy, who asked me how i could let him kiss me. i had no answer; there was never any time to say no beforehand. i had considered the delivery man to be my friend. he was much older, innappropriately older i thought at nineteen looking into fifty-year-old eyes. his kisses were most definitely unwanted, as were all his innuendoes and suggestions and flirtations. but kissing crossed the line, a line i made for myself and pretended not to see.

i felt guilty. he would remind me, constantly, of all the things i did that probably made him kiss me--how pretty i was, how sexy my clothes were, my new hairstyle. it wasn't just discovering radical feminists that helped me stop shaving and wearing makeup and allowed me to dress how ever i wanted instead of to please, it was to avoid "attracting that kind of attention", somehow.

it is hard even now to admit there was nothing more special about me than all those other women on campus he flirted with, except that i had not yet learned how to say no, that i was quieter than most women, that i didn't have a husband or boyfriend to talk about who might have presented some threat. that he knew he could take advantage of me.

i was grateful for my easy job at anna's, grateful because i had come there from working at the repair shop, where mark, my supervisor, gave me crappy jobs if i avoided his advances and allowed me to 'not work' or hang out with him if i would comply with flirting and listening to his stories.

i was harrassed every single day in the shop by both mark and david flirting and suggesting and i remember once being grateful for having a cold so that i could escape outside the shop hell and have a moment of peace, while blowing my nose, in the outside hallway. except that a repair crew was fixing something in the hallway, and while i leaned against the wall, miserable, headache and sinuses corked and sleepy feeling like shit, one of the repair men kept trying to ask me out on a date. there was no escape.

so anna's didn't seem so bad--the kisses not as bad as the all-the-time harassment, something i could forget, end quickly. again, i never confronted him or told anyone i worked with and avoided the situation. i eventually quit after a couple years and i probably stopped flirting with him and avoided him. once he wrote me an e-mail after i moved back home implying that he would like to visit. i forgot his name, for now, but i also have not visited my old campus and home in the three years since i have left. ironically, i will be on campus in the spring to talk to faculty and staff about gender activism. somehow i don't deem myself up for that job.