

The Girl with Many Names

a narrative collage

By Kristin LaFollette

This is a story

about Cohen told

through writings and letters

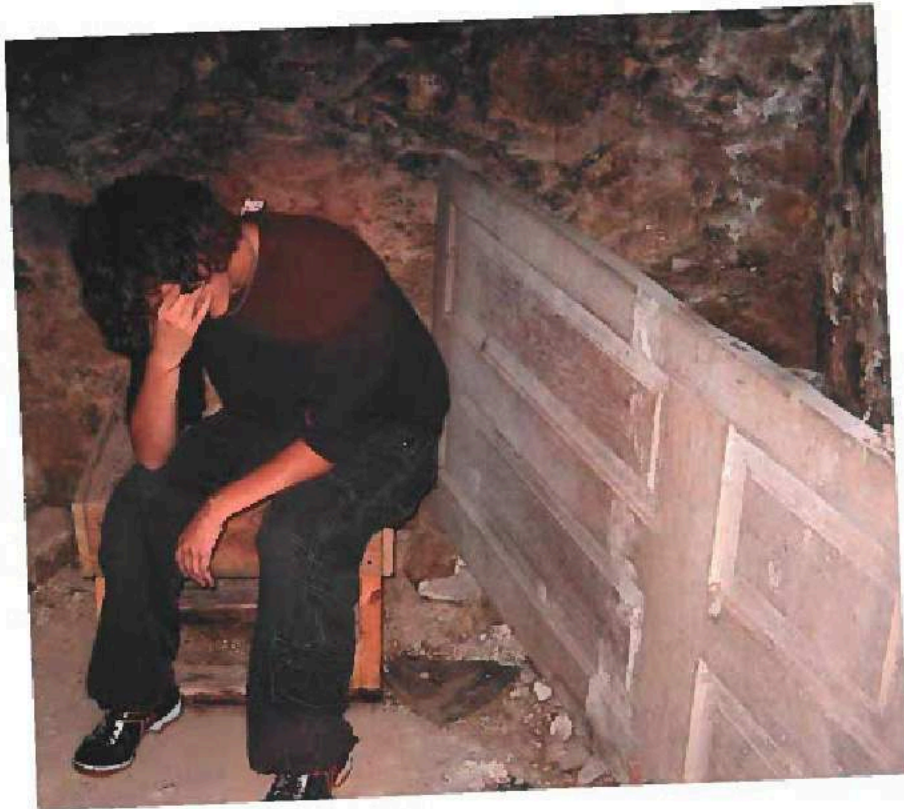
and notes (hers) and

through photographs and

words (mine)—

Part II

What We Know



I hope that you know that no matter what time of day,
What kind of drama, what kind of pain,
I am always here through thick and thin.
Because that's what friends do.

The boy and I are driving to
watch my brother play baseball
when my phone rings. It's Cohen,
and she tells me the doctors
finally know what's wrong with
her.

"It's a brain tumor," she says.

She tells me the tumor is like a
moss. Plant growth on a dead
tree. Fingers extending and
reaching and reaching into her
brain.

"I'm having surgery," she says.

Like a moss.

Growing growing growing

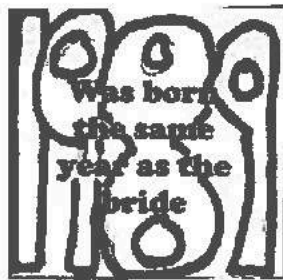


Brothers, we have several. Seth and Brice, summer grass.

Reaching, extending.

Reaching reaching reaching

Reaching reaching reaching



Reaching reaching reaching



I drive with a friend to see Cohen after her surgery. The doctor could only remove part of the tumor. Cohen's head is shaved and she has a large C-shaped scar that goes from behind her ear to her forehead. A nurse helps her walk to the restroom. I want to know what's next for Cohen but I'm too afraid to ask.

With Love Forever

Dee Batman Atticus

A few weeks later, Cohen's stepfather calls me on the phone.

"The tumor is terminal," he says.

"Terminal."

He says:

"It will grow back."

"They can't keep doing surgery."

"We are going to try chemo.
Radiation."

"We are going to try."

"The moss. It grows."





I'm sitting with the boy at a restaurant on the outdoor patio. There is an umbrella over our table, but I can still feel the sun on my skin. I think, *Maybe someone will find a cure before Cohen's tumor grows again.* I think, *Maybe she won't die.*

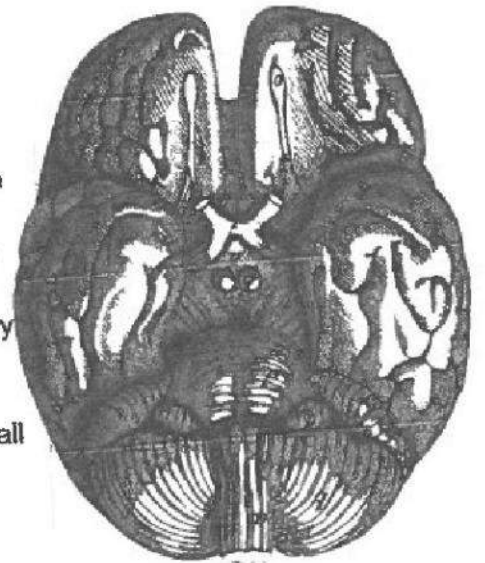
Maybe maybe

Maybe

that belongs to ME!

I would like IT BACK!!!

I find out Cohen has had a stroke
and my father drives me to see
her. We take a train in the city to
get to the hospital. She has lost
her vision, but she recognizes my
voice. I help feed her taco salad
and brush her hair. She looks
different, feels different. I'm hot all
over and just want to get out of
my own skin.



LaFollette takes the doctors,

board directors, and CEOs

around the world.



January

February

March

April

May

June

July

August

September

October

November

December

Cohen has spent time in rehabilitation and is back at home. As I visit with her, I notice her younger brother (Brice) is getting so big.

"I held you on the day you were born," I tell him.

He smiles and laughs, his dark brown eyes almost black in the dim lighting of Cohen's living room.

I notice Cohen's other brother, Seth, is starting to look less like a boy and more like a young man. I wonder how it's possible that so much time has passed.



The brother. Seth, a boy she loves.

Cohen and I met when we were in seventh grade. We are adults now, but Cohen hasn't been able to do the things she always wanted to do.

Be a journalist.

Travel.

Each time I see her, she seems less and less like herself. We still go out for birthdays, but crowded restaurants are no longer fun, her walker barely able to fit between the tables. Her mother must always accompany her, to tell when a seizure is coming on. To help Cohen see the things she can't.

I think, *Is this the girl I've always known?*

In some ways, I think, she's already gone.





It's been three years since
Cohen's diagnosis and I find out
that she has become
unresponsive. I go with the boy
and my father to see her. She is
in a hospital bed in her mother's
living room. A nurse tends to her.
I hold her hand, stroke her skin
which has become like paper. As
if it might tear under my touch.

Everyone steps outside and I sit
next to her bed, tell her things I
already know she knows but want
to make sure I say to her out
loud.

It is July.

I don't think there is anyone who understands me more than you do Kristin. I hope you know me well enough to realize that I will be here for you forever. It doesn't matter what I'm going through, I will always be here to listen to you. If all you want to do is talk, I will listen. If all you need is a distraction, I will be here. If you feel the need to just call and all we do is sit in silence, I'll be here. I'll be here for you to rant, or cry or anything. Don't hesitate to call me at anytime.



It is January.

Cohen's 28th birthday is on January 16th and her mother puts together a party for her. I walk carefully into the house on the afternoon of the party, the living room filled with black and blue and yellow decorations. Cohen is still unresponsive, but I think she knows I'm there. I whisper in her ear, sit next to her bed. Many of our friends are there, and I can tell they don't know what to say to me. I don't know what to say to them, either.



I see Cohen's mother and father hug for the first time in our 16-year friendship. They cry and embrace each other.

She's their baby, I think. Their baby.

January 19th.

Cohen's stepfather tells me over the phone that she has died. It is 6:30 in the morning.

~Kristin I will always be here for you, know matter what happens. I'm just a phone call away, and only five minutes from you. You're the greatest person I have ever met in my entire life. There is nobody that will even come close to

At the memorial, I see the faces of so many people Cohen loved. There are photographs of us on the projector screen with our families, our brothers, our mothers. The boy gets up and reads the eulogy I wrote because I don't think I can. During the service, I notice that the framed picture on the table with the ashes is one that my father took of Cohen. Our senior year of high school. In front of her father's barn.



Later, we release balloons in the park. The ground is cold and wet and the balloon string feels strange in my hand. I let it go and watch as it pulls further and further and further away from me until I can't see it at all.

