This ink is made of brutal elements: that crone, Louise Bourgeois; Winston’s final work of art; and his death. Soft things—my love for him—do not bear transcription. O, Winston!

This is how Winston Wallace fell in love with Louise Bourgeois.

He was already in his forties. Even when I knew him he had tight, unmarked skin, and no hair except his eyebrows—he looked exactly the same then; he looked like he would never change. He had an obscure black tattoo on the top of his head, above his right eye.

They met in a gallery in Florida, where they both stood over a mobile, by Calder. It was a block of wood, with a bent wire sticking out of it. A single red crescent hung from the wire, attached with fishing line. Winston liked its spareness—Louise, doubtless, was reminded of some part of the anatomy. She asked the clerk how much it cost. He did not recognize her—he told her that if she had to ask, she could not afford it. The clerk went to the bathroom, and she took a pair of nail scissors out of her bag, snipped the fishing line, and replaced it with a length of bright blue string from her pocket.

(Winston often told me about the other women in his life. He knew I was hurt, and he did not really mind. I think that he wanted me to be on edge—to be aware of him. I think that he was constructing a young biographer.)

The clerk returned, and Winston bought the piece. He picked it up brutally and ran out the door with the red, kidney-shaped sheet metal cutting against his knuckles. He caught up with Louise.

She was--is--almost eleven years older than him. She is 96 now. She turned to him and saw the mobile. “A more complicated mobile,” she said after a considered pause, “is like a whippletree, but vertical. The whippletree is a horizontal bar, perpendicular to the line through a horse and wagon; it hangs loosely to balance the torques inflicted by the animal. Its purpose is to hold something, to connect two things carefully: the load-bearer and the load. In this case, of course, the mobile only has one piece—no balance is necessary.”

Winston claimed that he said nothing—but I have never seen him speechless. It may be that he chose to spare me, a little.
Louise continued, “Then again, I suppose it still could be a whippetree.” She grinned toothily. She was hitting on him.

Winston asked why she had replaced the fishing line, and she said that it looked better that way—I don’t know if he agreed. He asked to borrow her nail scissors; he cut the string and handed her the metal crescent. He asked her to dinner the next day, and told her to bring the piece.

She responded: “Yes, I like that. Put it back together, but with a knot there. It will look good.”

That story made me want to desecrate Winston’s art—even his final piece, when I saw it after his death; when I had no one to impress. Especially his final piece. I used to consider taking part of a sculpture (most of his sculptures had several pieces), and mailing it to Australia. Or dotting the “i” in his signature, which he never remembered. I was too terrified, though—I thought that if I did this, Winston would have to love me or hate me. But he would not have cared, not for more than a minute or so. He moved very quickly.

He always called Louise beautiful, though she was not. I think he never really looked. He only saw the quick movement of nail scissors, the flash of a face in the blades; a series of bright blue knots, first one, then two, then several.

I told Winston that I loved art and that I was interested in art, but really I loved him, and I was interested in his art. I saw his work when I was fifteen—before we met, though not too long before. The Museum of Modern Art in New York was having a retrospective; my parents had dropped me off there before going to some conference, which was the reason we were in New York in the first place. The exhibit was called “Winston Wallace, Art Lover.”

Most of the work there was early Winston (vintage me, he called it), before he fell in love with Louise Bourgeois. His Louise. I am convinced that his early work was his best.

I wandered through the museum vaguely, with a sense of duty. I was convinced that I should go from each exhibit directly to the next, somehow passing judgment on every one. I did not want to be there. Now I know to pass through museums idiosyncratically—crossing from one side to the other at random and then returning to where I started. To imagine that the galleries are set up differently, with the Impressionists on the walls of the Armor Court, for example. Think of it, in the Met--Henry VIII’s
armor, with ‘The Japanese Bridge’ reflected in his breastplate.

But at the time I walked stolidly in a circle around each room, and then on to the next. I was hard to impress. Rothko bored me. I thought Hirst was funny: ‘Beans/Chips, 100 mg.’ I saw several pieces by Bourgeois--‘The Destruction of the Father,’ various ‘Femmes Maison’ and ‘Spiral Women’--small pustules surrounding a dinner table; women’s bodies with houses attached gruesomely to their shoulders; women with their upper bodies wrapped in thick, eponymous spirals. I hated her work then, too.

I walked into the main exhibit, Winston’s retrospective, without noticing it. By this time, I was no longer paying attention to the art. Instead, I found myself staring at the walls. At short intervals, I would look at the time. I rubbed the blond down on my arm, above and below my watch, which was a pink, girly thing. I noticed that my feet hurt--now, I think that physical exertion is one of the pleasures of museums--and I sat down on one of the misshapen leather couches that populated MoMA before it was rebuilt.

The painting was inhuman. The creatures in it were impossible, twisted things. They were subdued, like white stone, and one held the other, dead and lovely, draped over some protrusion of its body or the ground. Winston had titled the painting, ‘La Pieta.’ I cried and cried, and an older woman held me against her shoulder.

You’ve seen that painting--Winston created it when he was in his early twenties. When he was only a few years older than I am now, I think; this always bothered me when I was with him, but when I mentioned it he would tease me, in a whisper.

There was a picture of the young Winston on the label by ‘La Pieta’; he was handsome, but not as handsome as when I knew him. In this picture, he didn’t have the easy authority I associate with him now, and there was something watery about his stare. I thought, he must have just painted this incredible piece; he must have just finished crying, like me. When I went to sleep that night, I dreamt that I was dead and that he was holding me in his lap.

When I met Winston for the first time I was with my boyfriend; it was the sort of relationship where, when a boy asked if I was single, I would say, “No, not currently.” I do still remember the boy’s name, but I think he would be embarrassed if I were to mention it here. We were freshmen at the same college, near Boston. At some point, I had told him about my admiration for Winston. Several weeks
later, he came into my room excitedly, holding the course book for the next semester; he had just discovered that Winston was teaching a class in the spring. He was smiling like nice boys do when they know that they’ve been nice.

We went to the first class together. Winston was a visiting professor. The course was called To Serve Man, after an episode of The Twilight Zone. In the show, aliens land on Earth; they completely eradicate hunger and illness. The title of one of their books is decoded: “To Serve Man.” Men and women across the Earth travel to their planet, which is a paradise from which the humans never bother to return. At the end of the show, it is discovered that “To Serve Man” is a cookbook. Winston said that he wanted us to think like this—to be raw, and alien. To look at art from an inhuman angle: to let it eat us alive.

I broke up with my boyfriend after that class; the next day he dropped out of every one of the four courses we were taking together. I was not in love with Winston yet, I think, but I knew that this boy could never be anything other than human. I felt very sick for the rest of the week. I managed to go to most of my classes, but I couldn’t bring myself to return to Winston’s class (Professor Wallace’s class—it sounds so grotesque) until the following Monday.

This seems very pedestrian in retrospect. My boyfriend, my classes. My hair was stringy, and darker, then; I always felt tired. I hung a towel over the mirror each night, so I wouldn’t see my disheveled morning sadness. My grades were very important to me. I missed my ex-boyfriend and I almost called him several times. We lived in the same dorm, and we would pass each other at the door and look at the stairs or the bulletin board. I drew pictures, all the time, on desks and in my notebooks, of drooping, immobile creatures.

I forgot to close the curtains in my room one night—the next morning, the sunlight woke me up at 7:00 AM, two hours earlier than usual. It was early April, and I was suddenly aware of the sharp bitter sunlight on my body; I slept naked, without sheets. I took the towel off the mirror and I was: charming, happy. This was right after Spring Break. My legs were long and pale. I went to Winston’s class, and I sat in the front row, and I smiled at him.
Winston would tell me, almost every day: “I am a fool.” He meant it as a compliment to me, somehow. An apology for Louise, and for the fact that I was not really an artist. An Artist: he always saw the word engraved and capitalized. I’m not an artist yet, I would say, and he would look sharply at me, like he expected more. You’ll write non-fiction, he would say. I’ll write honest fiction. If you like, he’d say.

How much of this will you believe? I meander; I’m young, so much younger than him. Winston would tell you to be skeptical, but that it doesn’t matter, anyway. Here are some of Winston’s pieces, which you can see in museums, just so you can be sure:

A diptych. The left panel is a picture of Louise, made of colored blocks. If one looks closely, each block is a picture of Winston, made of colored blocks, each of which is a picture of Louise, and so on. The right panel is identical to each block on the left: a picture of him, built from Louise, built from him...The piece is technically incredible. How could he have turned his face into hers? It’s called ‘Infinitych’ and is located in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York.

A beautiful girl—the painting could be mistaken for an anachronistic Vermeer; she is wearing a bandana and her cheeks are dirty. Wherever you stand in the gallery, the girl seems to be looking away from you. ‘Untitled,’ also in the Met.

A bronze statue of an elderly woman, sitting upright in a sparse chair. She has high cheekbones, and is thin and her eyes, which have no pupils or irises, are hard to look into. She has a mirror on her lap, and her hands are wrinkled. Titled ‘Joanna Lansom,’ the sculpture is in the Museum of Modern Art, in New York.

One of his earliest pieces; a canvas which is almost entirely white. If one looks closely, one can see gray canyons and a sort of uneven, phosphorescent red glow. ‘The Skin of My Teeth,’ in the Detroit Institute of Arts.

A diorama of a busy city street; the buildings are taller than the diorama, and their tops fade to nothing. The street is crowded, but it is like a proscenium—all of the passers-by stare out at you as they shop and walk, except for one or two, who look shyly at their feet. It is titled ‘Don’t Blink’ and is located in the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Engraved in the floor of the gallery: impressions of twenty men and women, grasping one another’s legs, or torsos, or faces. If people were to lie down in these molds, they would spell out the
words “hold me,” in all capital letters. Titled ‘Hold Me,’ the piece is also on display in the Cleveland Museum of Art. The impressions are well-worn; Winston insisted that people be allowed to touch the piece. There is a famous picture in which he and Louise make up the “L.”

A gong, which viewers are invited to hit. Hidden behind the gong is a foam pad, which is subtly connected to the instrument’s frame--so that even a violent attempt produces at most a dull thud. ‘Untitled,’ at the Guggenheim in New York.

A freestanding door in the center of a room. If you look through the keyhole on one side, you see a bedroom, in some disarray: bright red sheets, a book open and upside-down on the bed, clothes strewn across the carpet. If you look through the other side, you see an open, inquiring eye. ‘Art,’ in the Museum of Fine Arts, in Boston. Winston remarked to me: “This one confuses the hell out of about half of the people who see it—you have to get lucky and pick the right side first.” I saw the bedroom first; I think that is the correct order.

Once, we took a road trip together, from Boston to New York. This was a year and a half before his death. He complained about his eyes, so I drove. I do not think it would have mattered; the sun was so bright that I could barely see, anyway. As we left Massachusetts, Winston turned to me suddenly and asked, “Do you think that some of my art is just gimmicks?”

I didn’t say anything. He had suggested the trip, without giving a reason for it. I wondered why he wanted to go to New York. “Sometimes, I think of an idea, and it seems great, but then a month or a year later it’s stupid.” His voice was worried, and earnest. I had never heard this tone before.

“Did Louise say that, about gimmicks?” I asked. This time, he didn’t respond. “That’s crap,” I said. He was sketching something in his notebook: two stone blocks, of indeterminate scale, suspended in the air by ropes.

We continued towards New York. I could feel Winston staring at me; usually I loved that, but that day it made me intensely uncomfortable. Was I a gimmick? He reached over and touched my knee, and I jumped; the car swerved a bit before I righted it. He laughed and whispered something kind. Then: “I think I know what it is: I’m getting smarter, all the time. But everyone else still loves what I do—I guess I’m just leaving you all in the dust.” And he laughed, like it was a joke.

“You’re just getting older,” I told him. He coughed, and kissed me on the cheek.

He wasn’t done though: “Louise wouldn’t say something like that, you know. About my art.”
And suddenly I was crying, and telling him how much I hated Louise—I had not said this before—and I pulled over and put my head against the horn, so it wailed as well; I had hoped the sound would be plaintive, but it was simply angry. He touched my forehead, gently moved it off of the horn. “It’s alright to hate her,” he said. “Would you like me to drive?” He didn’t move.

I was still crying, and he looked out the window; we were in New Canaan, in Connecticut, I think. It sounds like a place where momentous things would happen, but I remember it as the worst place in the world. He grinned, like he had a brilliant idea. “Let’s stop in White Plains, it’s almost on the way. I know a great Chinese restaurant there. I think you’ll like it.” Suddenly, he seemed very old, like my grandfather. We drove towards White Plains; it was not very far, maybe half an hour. I hadn’t let him take the wheel, so he gave me directions.

We found the place quickly—Winston was usually terrible with navigation, but he seemed to know exactly where it was. The restaurant was called ‘Sixty-Four Golden Fingers.’ Winston had been reading to me while we drove; I think it was an O’Henry story, though I don’t remember which one, and I had cheered up somewhat. We pushed open the door—Winston, oddly, saying, “I hope they’re open,” though the door was unlocked. As we entered the room, Winston grabbed me and kissed me forcefully, on the mouth, for several seconds. I was surprised, but I relaxed into it. He had never held me like this before, and I held onto him tightly, expecting shock from the place’s patrons.

I looked around, dizzy. No one else moved—all the other customers, and the waiters, were statues, made of porcelain. Winston and I laughed and I grabbed him and kissed him again. Another couple walked into the artwork several minutes later; they stared, confused, at the thirty frozen customers and the living old man kissing a living young girl. They said nothing and walked out, and we laughed again, for a long time. “I call it ‘Sixty-Four Golden Fingers,’” he said. “I own the building. This one is my favorite.”

He pointed to a statue of a young woman, sitting at one of the tables. She was very serious and was writing in a yellow notepad, and she had short, blond hair, like mine.

We continued on to his studio, in Greenwich Village. When we got there, I lay down on the couch. It was four o’clock, or a little after, and the sun filtered greenly through his plants and over me. When I woke up, late at night, he was not in the studio; tacked to the wall opposite me was a drawing
of the couch, with me on it. It was life-size, and I felt displaced--like part of me was imprinted on the paper, still unconscious. Winston must have drawn me just after I fell asleep: the girl in the portrait was dappled by sunlight.

I missed him terribly at times like these. I wandered around the studio, looking for something to read; eventually, I picked up the book of short stories he had been reading aloud in the car. Most of them were very funny, usually, but that night they upset me. So many people, making mistakes. Why should that be funny?

Winston returned with a bundle of letters, tied together with two pieces of string. He put them in a drawer, in a small wooden desk. I think that this may have been the purpose of the trip: to show me where he kept his papers. We went on a walk, and he took me to a play. I think we saw a movie together, though that may have been at a different time. Something with obnoxiously religious overtones, which we didn’t expect when we bought the tickets.

I do not think that there is any way I can tell you about Winston. Perhaps this is obvious: his art does this much better than I can, with the exception, I think, of his final work. Don’t just look at his art; imagine him making it.

He was fascinated by Louise Bourgeois’s ‘Spiral Woman’ series. Her ability to repeat the same subject, again and again, with imperceptible--often nonexistent--alterations, confused him. The ‘Spiral Woman’ was a pair of legs, protruding from a long tube, which was wrapped into a spiral. If one were to put all of Louise’s ‘Spiral Women’ next to one another, there would be a thousand pairs of legs, sticking out of a thousand spirals. Some of the women are thinner than others. In some cases, the spiral allows the woman’s head to escape; it simply elongates her body. Some are sculptures, hanging from the ceiling; some are drawings; some are prints.

Winston was attracted to the straightforwardness of the metaphor, the Shel-Silverstein-ness of it. (Don’t be vulgar, he’d say, if he read that.) You look at it and you just “get it.” There is a woman: she is trapped by a spiral. There are hundreds of women, a thousand women: they are trapped by spirals. Their naked legs dangle. Their hair hangs limp, to the side, like a vine. They are metal, or latex, or paper.

My Winston spent several years trying to duplicate this effect; eventually, I suppose, he succeeded.
Here are some letters that Winston wrote to his love, Louise Bourgeois:

May 4, 2007

Dear Louise,

I love you.

Winston

There it is, nakedly. I read it after his death, after I discovered his body. He committed suicide in that room, where he kept the letters—he kept a copy of every one.

December 14, 1988

Dear Louise,

Today I visited a nursing home, to see a former friend, and I thought of you. I mean that as a compliment, actually, not as a reference to our mutual agedness. It reminded me of your series, ‘Cells’. The rooms in the nursing home are small, and cluttered, and you can only see them properly when you contort yourself, so that you are looking at them immobile, sitting on the bed and looking backwards: this is hindsight. The way that old people see. Perhaps that is what you mean by your little enclosures? The imperative: bend your head uncomfortably, if you want to see inside! This is what it means to be old! To be alien.

This is why I like your ‘Cells’ with solid walls—they have an obscurity of vision. I understand the aims of your pieces with chain-link walls, I think, but they breathe too well. A cell should be stagnant; air, and the breeze through a gallery, are as important to the viewing as the visual aspect of the piece. Your solid ‘Cells’ are obstructive, and I think this is their strength. One of their strengths.

I visited this former friend of mine—former because he no longer remembers me. Alzheimer’s. There is something pure about the disease, to go with its terror, or so it seems to me. It is infantile and circular. This man was homeless, in Cambridge, (Massachusetts, not
England), when I knew him. He sold the “Spare Change News,” a newspaper whose only purpose was to be sold by the homeless; to give them an occupation. A circular again, both in fact and aim. He was aggressive, in an endearing way: he would greet you with a “Hello, young man!” in a deep voice, which was not how he naturally spoke. I admit that I began talking to him largely because of this brave obtrusiveness on his part, and because he was (is) black. I think that this was more of an acceptable reason at the time, though I suspect liberal-minded young men and women--white men and women--are still motivated by it. We talked at least once a week, for several years. He had very interesting views; I disagreed with him on most of them. When he found out who I was (he knew my name but had not heard of me), our relationship was damaged irrevocably. I think he understood that I viewed him as a piece of art, better than I understood this fact myself, at the time. I pay for his nursing care, in penance. I am morally bankrupt, but you know this about me.

You are beautiful, and I would like to hear about your day.

I love you.

Winston

I do not think that Winston received a response to that letter; if he did, I could not find it. It is one of my favorites, out of his correspondence with Louise. Almost-vintage Winston.

June 17, 1975

Dear Louise,

I saw your most recent ‘Spiral Woman’ today, at the Tate. The series worries me sometimes--perhaps I am the spiral and you are the woman, and you think I squeeze the breath out of your lungs, that I squeeze you so hard that I extrude your legs like toothpaste? I do try to give you space. I’m sorry; I know that you wouldn’t theme your piece so straightforwardly. I’m just insecure sometimes--I miss you terribly. But you don’t want to hear about that.

Tell me about your day, please. I’ve been attempting to write poetry; it turns out that this is rather difficult. There is a temptation towards the abstract, whereas concrete language is
almost invariably stronger. Compare, “please let me have some time to myself” and “you squeeze me so hard that you extrude my legs like toothpaste,” for example. The latter is clearly much stronger. Your ‘Spiral Women’ are strong because they are not metaphorical--there is an actual woman there, being crushed by a spiral. Very concrete. And perhaps the spiral is just a spiral.

I love you.

Winston

It is strange to see Winston so upset--I could never upset him, even if I tried.

I only met Louise once, at Winston’s funeral; we spent less than three hours together. She is extremely old: 96, as you recall. She is dry and lucid.

At Winston’s funeral, I was very confused. It was only three days after his death; only two after I had discovered his body, and his last work. I had not yet recovered. I wandered through the crowd--I think I was the only one there who was not famous. I was the only one there that I did not recognize, from a magazine, or an exhibition, or something.

Louise took me aside: “You are the girl he was with, the last few months?” she asked. She sounded very kind, and I nodded, with my tongue stuck drily to the bottom of my mouth. I was dressed all in black, and not wearing any makeup; my hair was covered with a black cloth. She had a red stripe across her loose black shirt. Suddenly, she hugged me against her body, so my head rested on her shoulder, and I could smell her aridity. I was shaking.

She held me gently against herself--she is very thin--and then looked around quickly. Not many people had seen us, and she led me out of the room. She spoke slowly to me, like a concerned teacher. “I would like to talk about him. Would you?”

I didn’t know. “This is the first funeral I’ve ever been to,” I admitted. I was still crying, between words. She told me that funerals get easier. “I’ve been to at least fifty,” she said. We both found this funny, somehow. I told her that Winston had loved her very much.
The room we were in was dark, and small, and very comfortable. The windowsills were upholstered with dark, purple velvet cushions—we were sitting on one, not quite facing one another. We both spoke slightly outwards, to the empty room. There was very little color in the room, except for Louise’s flushed cheeks, and the stripe on her shirt. For a second, I imagined I saw her like Winston did: in the flash of a pair of nail scissors. Her hair was tight against her head, wrapped into a small bun. Her skirt was black, made of very light fabric. There were hints of bags under her eyes, and she had very good teeth. The effect of her face was strange—it seemed flattened and sunken in, like she had been lying down for years, and, during that time, it had been pulled into her skull slightly, by gravity. She was looking at me carefully, evaluating, and I was suddenly very afraid.

“Winston was a very ordinary man,” she said, after a while. “It confused me when I realized this. Of course, he was a genius. His art—most of it, at least—was very good. But as a man, he was not special.” She looked out the window; there was a bleak garden, mostly ivy, outside. No flowers, which seems odd for a funeral home. “That is not exactly what I mean. He was unusual, certainly. He had an uncanny understanding. But what I mean is this: he could not have gotten everyone so well if he was not a little bit like them. He was the same as everyone else, mostly.” She looked at me directly, suddenly, and put her hand on my elbow. She didn’t want to hurt me. “Please do not cry, girl.”

“I knew him better than you ever did,” I said. I suddenly sat up straight and looked at her, into her soft, blurry, blue eyes. I thought of Winston’s sculpture of me, as a proud old woman. I was grim.

She smiled, genuinely, and said, “Good for you.” She put her hand on mine, and we were equals momentarily.

But she was much stronger than me, and a second later I was crying again, with my head in her lap, and she stroked my hair. I took a crumpled piece of paper out of my purse, where it had been for the last several months, and I gave it to her. It was a poem that Winston had written for me. She read aloud, in a soft monotone, exactly how I like poems to be read.

*Walking Song II*

*by Winston Wallace*

*Now this road is cracked and aged, like my hands and feet—*
But soon, this road will be ours. You are a repaving,
You are smooth, and full of whisper and purpose.
When I say, “Joanna!” I will do this:

I will spin, with my arms outstretched and my head laid back,
Looking through the leaves exactly at the flare
Of the sun; I can lift you like a little girl, with your white dress
Unfurling your long, sunny legs.

When we walk, you are my brace, my cane,
I can go unsupported.
When I say, “Joanna!” I will be strange, and alien;
I will canvas your gasp and your smile.

When Louise read this poem it was beautiful. She told me, kindly: “I think he did love you.”
Even though she was lying, I felt that we were friends; I felt that, suddenly, we were alike. We walked back into the other room, where the reception still in progress.

Several people gave short speeches to the others there; neither Louise nor I participated. None of them knew Winston very well. The speeches were uniformly boring and inaccurate, and someone’s car alarm went off twice outside, prompting nervous laughter each time.

Afterwards, Louise sought me out again: “Joanna, I am wondering: how did he commit suicide?” I imagine she learned my name from the poem. I felt I owed her this, after her kindness—Louise, the woman that Winston had loved. I told her to follow me.

We walked to the parking lot, and I gestured to my car, a blue Camry. She sat down in the passenger’s seat, and I turned the ignition. I told her that we were going to Winston’s Greenwich Village studio; she nodded. She had been there before—before I was born, I imagine. We drove silently; I felt that I should prepare her—for Winston’s final work, and for what I would have to describe: how he had committed suicide. But I couldn’t speak. She turned to me and saw that I was crying again, and said nothing. We stopped twice, so that I could clear my eyes. It should have been a
fifteen-minute drive, but instead it took half an hour.

I unlocked the door; the building was a squat, brick apartment complex that Winston had owned. It was now held in trust by some distant relative. His studio was on the top floor—the other floors had been kept empty, so that the entire building was completely quiet. He had liked that. We began to climb the stairs; the building had three floors. When we reached the second landing, I finally turned, and said too loudly, “You should know—the body is still there. The casket was empty.”

She was surprised. “It has been three days. That seems strange. But that’s good; I would like to see it, I think.” I nodded, my throat closing up. I opened the door, remembering the last time I had been here, when I had found his body.

This was Winston’s final work: Two enormous, granite blocks, each almost as tall as a man, with comparable length and width. One hung from the ceiling by four ropes, tied around hooks driven into its top; the other, to the right, hung by two ropes, so that it could swing freely if driven by some terrible force. Both were three feet above the ground. The block on the left had the imprint of a man’s back carved into it; the one on the right had the impression of his front. Embedded in this second block, in the impression, were several sharp objects: metal spikes, and glass.

This is how Winston committed suicide: He attached a pulley and winch to the block on the right, cranking it backwards until it was flush against the wall, straining against the ropes. He measured carefully, for a few minutes, and eventually satisfied, he made a chalk mark on the ground, somewhere between the two blocks. After checking a lever mechanism he had attached to the winch holding the right block against the wall, he stood carefully on the chalk marking. He spread his arms apart slightly, mirroring the carvings in the blocks in front of and behind him. He triggered the lever mechanism with his foot. A rope was released; the block in front of him fell forward. Winston did not move. His eyes were closed. The spikes and glass embedded in the block pierced him in his forehead, and along his spine; he died instantly and felt nothing. He was lifted off the ground—more spikes, along the outside of the impression he now filled, drove into the other block, holding the two together.

And this is what Louise and I saw—two enormous, granite blocks, driven together by a terrible force, hanging connected, with Winston’s undecayed legs protruding underneath, his feet an inch above the ground. The piece is called ‘Spiral Man’. Several days later, a team of experts revealed that the carvings in the granite fit Winston perfectly—he was completely unharmed, except for the damage done
by the spikes and glass. He had coated the inside of the carving with a preservative. Blood dripped
down his legs, and pooled underneath the sculpture. The team of experts performed an ultrasound,
which showed that he was holding something in his left hand, trapped in the stone and twisted around his
fingers: a knotted string.

Louise opened her mouth, and, for less than a second, she seemed surprised. She quickly
regained control. “Such a waste,” she said, lifting her chin. And suddenly, I hated her again, more than
I had hated her before. She did not mean Winston’s death--she meant the artwork. She was noting
that it was not original; that it was unsuccessful. She had considered Winston’s body, his final work and
decided that it was not worthwhile. That it was nothing. And she was right.

I looked at Louise, and I finally saw her: a flash of blades, sharp, and deadly.