AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHRYN
ON THE TOPIC OF LOVE LETTERS

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INTRODUCED by
DANIYYEL IRONSIDE

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The transcript has been edited for the purposes of concision and readability.

INTRODUCTION

The Love Letter's Intention

"Thus after God is stripped of everything that might be attributed to him, all that is left of God is precisely the name itself as a material trace. Yet the nameless name of God is called out not to designate, but as a stand-in for designation. To be sure, in naming God, the mystics name or designate nothing, yet in designating nothing, that is failing to designate something, to provide us with a referent, this nameless name points to the divine beyond. Put otherwise, the uncanny divine name is lacking, but it lacks nothing: it is precisely this lack that lacks nothing that is a sign of the divine."

Jelica Šumič, in *Towards a Limitless Love*

"Only this thinking wishful dream brings about something real, harkening deeply in itself until the gaze succeeds: into the soul, into the third kingdom after the stars and the heaven of the gods - waiting for the word, turned towards the enlightenment of a great maturity. The urge to correspond with oneself draws soul into this dreadful world, into its unknowing, its terror and its guilty conscience of its finality; everything that is has a utopian star in its blood, and philosophy would be nothing if it did not form the ideational solution for this crystalline heaven of renewed reality."

Enst Bloch, in *Spirit of Utopia*

In her 'Revelations of Divine Love', Julian of Norwich writes "Prayer unites the soul to God; for though the soul is always like God in nature and substance, it is often unlike him in condition through sin on man's part. Then prayer makes the soul like God when the soul wills as God wills and then it is like God in condition as it is in nature". God's essential nature, she asserts, is a love "universal and in common", by which we are each moved and in which we are all one. To pray in the spirit of love is to align one's spirit in condition with the absolute and its being. Although Julian insists that God's being the foundation of our prayer assures that there is no prayer which has not itself been willed, and no object of prayer which is not an object of divine love – I have this habitual fear of sin. And although she insists that "sin is nothing", I yet find it truer in pray to insist on nothing distinct from love. The love letter is not unlike prayer; it's by meditating upon the passions that we render our intention. But what ought that intention be? Is the love letter a prayer which dedicates itself to the spirit of love (its unfolding as it may), or one of those which makes to subordinate the most vital force to our own desirous will. Or, to raise the heart of the question – is the love letter a tool in the manifestation of desire's particular designs; it its function instrumental?

Instruments function according to a system of codes, which – given proper employ and conformity – bring about outcomes prescribed by the operative potential of the instrument itself. It is in this sense that the logic of instruments is anticipatory - outcomes are promised in advance; the failure to bring about whatever future thereby, appearing then to come consequence of human (user) error. This thinking inevitably limits our subjective horizons. Not only does it efface that contingency proper to anything miraculous, unexplainable, or sublime, but we are made jealous or covetous of those shared futures which instrumental logics projected and promised. As fantasy's depotentiation assumes psychic equivocation to the theft of a world, we must admit our becoming embrittled to heartbreak.

So, what then? Must the love letter issue no promise, admitting only one's surrendering to love qua absolute? Surely our lovers will find themselves disappointed if we demonstrate no particular ambition; the love letter which concludes "Que será, será" will surely mark too, the end of a relationship. There must be some wish, some ask, something which motivates the flight of fantasy; a lure. Rather than abandoning the object, perhaps we might merely shift our intention, and our relation toward it.

Ernst Bloch – another mystic, of sorts – wrote, "As important as it is, however, that the will be relieved of every particular purpose and turned towards the Absolute, this equally urgent obligation still finally arises [...] to let a sun rise, a goal applicable at least as an objective moment [...] no longer endlessly elusive but rather, as in Eckhart, again fundamentally attainable, utopianly real." The urgent obligation which, as Bloch puts it, allows a sun to rise, is exactly the type of hopefulness which poses (but does not presuppose) the imaginary end of situational flows. Desire must be allowed its object-form, so long as it insists as pure horizon; utopianly real insofar as it is true to desire's refraction by current aspect, but actual only inasmuch as it is a phantasm of intention. Like Eckhart, who endlessly rewrote names of God in search of that which is one and true; like Eckhart, who articulated the true name not in language, but by insistence in fidelity; the promise of love is rendered only in the broken promises of desire.

The love letter's intention should never find itself fixed on any particular object; the intention it shares (with one's beloved, and proper prayer) is to pay fidelity to love and its hopefulness – not in anticipation, but in readiness for whatever might come to pass. There are few greater insults to love than to suggest it is predictable. Where anticipation deprives love its contingency, hope affirms its being inspiring, affirms its potential, affirms its being something to be excited for – and all that without jealous expectation nor the disciplining of love by the limits of our instrumental logics. In this sense, we might say that in the love letter as in prayer, and as concerns sin – "the object is nothing", nothing distinct from those expressions of love which inspire our imaginations, our actions, our spirit's address...

I had absolutely no hope, admittedly, of introducing Kathryn's interview by summary. Her ideas are complex, her experience heartfelt, and her language one with which I am yet to become completely familiar. Many of the ideas here remain out of my reach. Which is why I've written in place of an abstract, something to hold and sustain tension with the text. Introducing another mysticism and other mystics of my own, I hope to meet Kathryn somewhere more proximate to her sphere, rather than placing in a purely disjunct context – as a sort of specimen (albeit, some disjunction is inevitable, even desirable). I want to express my gratitude to Kathryn for sharing her time and her insights, which – despite my evasiveness – serve brilliantly as a site of learning and understanding.

KATHRYN

What, to you, is a love letter?

It's such a loaded question, it can go in so many different directions. On one hand there's this very stereotypical, superficial answer: beautiful, wonderful, eloquently written things. Maybe odes and [haptics?], romantic poetry and sublime, rhythmic, rhyming words. Part of me loves that idea of a love letter, but I think ultimately there's a level of vulnerability and honesty – truth – to them. I think love is something that is often perceived as only happy and joyful, it's very bright and bubbly. But sometimes the most loving thing, the most loving love letter, can be the hardest, most gut wrenching, grief filled thing. It's putting your heart or your armour out there, and allowing all of you to be seen. Sometimes it's having the hard conversations; that in and of itself is a love letter – admitting you're wrong, admitting you don't want to settle, admitting something's really upset you. If you love a person - or a place, or a thing - you honour that communication. I think a love letter is a means toward that openness in the communication of all aspects of love. Love; inherently coming from a place of passion, and from passion is anger, is frustration, is sadness, but so too is joy, contentment, the full spectrum of things. To love is to feel every emotion under the sun. So confining that to a piece of paper... perhaps after all, poetry is not a love letter; nor are gorgeous, joyful words. They only encapsulate a tiny percentage of what it is to love fully.

Are you saying that poems can never be love letters, or is it that there is something more-than the poem itself which could... elevate it?

I think intentionality is a major component. If your intention is to write a love letter, in whatever form... a rose is a rose, and a love letter is a love letter. But if there are any hidden intentions, or coercive intentions, then that is not a love letter; that's emotional manipulation. Beautiful words, underneath – resentment, frustration, dishonesty. I think, for the most part, we all have good intentions. But sometimes it is difficult to be honest, and to share that honesty when crafting beautiful things. Sometimes it's easier to go around those [difficult] things; it seemingly hurts us less. But in the long run, it does far more damage than good.

That there's something which makes a love letter that is not strictly formal? For example, being honest?

It sounds as though beauty – at least for its own sake – isn't something you believe a love letter must strive to affect.

I struggle with that one, because I am such a sucker for beauty. But for me, beauty is inherently dichotomous - a polarity. I see beauty in the renewed, the birth, the reborn, but also in the decaying. There is something beautifully poetic in nature's ephemerality; in the understanding that nothing is permanent – you get to enjoy everything's every stage. In the case of idealised beauty, sure, I love and appreciate those sorts of things. But I think of those difficult moments of honesty, or difficult moments of sadness, of love, of grief – the painful, and gut wrenching, and raw, and awful, and uncomfortable... In hindsight they have been incredibly beautiful experiences.

I might be imposing, so please tell me if I'm wrong. I hope it's fair to say that a formal, transcendental beauty is not something which particularly interests you, but rather a beauty which emerges from

Yeah, I think that beauty is often the result of an alchemy or a metamorphosis; the result of a process or an unfolding; a series of occurrences which are maybe chance or maybe circumstance, which magically align to create something greater. And I think that's inherently beautiful. It's all that context which built that thing, that tension – those tensions emergent of their relationality?

moment; that experience or perception of a person, place, theme; that level of compassion and clarity and understanding and, again, that honesty. It's the full breadth of that experience which I think is so gorgeously divine. You can look at a butterfly and admire its beauty, but you know that that butterfly was once a hungry, hungry caterpillar. It has been on this wild journey. It's avoided being stepped on or eaten by a bird. It's traversed vast landscapes only to surrender it all in the chrysalis. It moved between solid form and mush several, several times. Then finally, unlocking its DNA, its deep remembrance of what it was always meant to become, it has emerged as this beautiful butterfly. [Beautiful], yes, in this very visual or even superficial way, but more-so for its having been on such a long journey. Through all that, to emerge as such a gracious creature [...] And then there's the additional context that you can find butterflies feasting on decaying flesh, deep within the forest [...] There is this incredible dichotomy [...] Everything is contradictory, is inherently flawed, is doing its best... It's the journeys that we each undergo which make us all beautiful in our [own] way.

So, drawing us back to the love letter. Is it fair to say that you believe a love letter cannot be beautiful in and of itself, but because of its being an object in process; even an object which will go on to affect those processes and relationships which conjugate – as you put it – our journeys.

Yes, in so many ways; in the journey which literally unfolds, in sitting down, in writing, in the coffee-stained paper – the gorgeous romanticism of that image. Maybe it's a busy coffee shop, or a quiet little restaurant, or somewhere lit by candlelight [...] those things are cute to think about. But really, it's that journey a person undertakes when they find the bravery to pick up the pen and paper, the paintbrush; to press play on that camera, to record a beautiful rhythmic dance... That's a journey in itself. Then the love letter will go on its own journey in its reception by the intended reader [...] or it might get lost along the way, and someone else finds those beautiful love-words. Then there's all the journeys that each reader must undergo to establish their understandings, or indeed to find their medium, to find their love language – we all communicate and express love differently. That's what the full spectrum of love is. Love is the expression of everything.

With such an... expansive, definition of love, is there anything which would differentiate the love letter from any other form of expression? If love is "The expression of everything", is there any letter, or indeed any communication whatsoever, which is not – then – a sort of love letter?

Yeah, I think for me - and maybe the more egoic part of me – I see the love letter as the recipe of pen, paper, intention, time; the intention to have this physical manifestation of love, of affection, of adoration, of honesty and truth. But I'd like to think I know myself better than that, and I can't settle with that being the only recipe. Love is ephemeral. It's intangible and therefore cannot be confined to pen and paper – it transcends that medium. I think what makes a love letter is the intentionality. It can be a performance, it can be sending a song [...], a film [...], or so many things. [...] I think the creative act is such a channelled experience and typically comes from some facet of love, therefore is extrapolated into a love letter regardless of your intention to send [a love letter as such]. I think, in a way, humans are always writing love letters – whether we send them or not.

It makes me wonder if the

I don't think so, not for a really long time.

KATHRYN

term "love letter" is even that useful here. It seems as though it could become quite arbitrary... in the normative sense, have you written love letters?

But I think the expression "love letter" acts as a sort of vessel [...] a sort of structure for something that has no structure. Being so soft, almost intangible, it's nice to have something – a tether – to hold onto or follow through; to unify so many vast, complex, yet stupidly simple ideas.

Why do you think you haven't written a love letter in so long?

I think I've just been afraid to. As I was saying before, I think I thought love letters had to be so full of affection and passion and adoration, and the opposite when more difficult conversation needs to be had. It's hard to put those to pen and paper, and I suppose those [feelings] are more easily delivered when you can render tone, and you can feel intentionality. I used to write bits of poetry all the time and share them, but I think recently I've been very stuck in my own head - very ungrounded. I've not given myself the time. Not even give – I haven't gifted myself the time to lead into all that. [...] It's very scary...

It's interesting that you bring up tone, and an inability – through the letter – to really register it. It makes the love letter seem quite abstracted. It implicates distance, which seems paradoxical as an object so entangled with intimacy. Is the love letter insufficiently intimate for the types of exchanges you want – or need – to have?

I suppose there's a lot of hiding you can do in a love letter [...] you can disguise what you're really saying in a love letter. [...] But when you're cornered in a room together, all bets are off. You just need to be eye to eye, face to face, hand in hand with someone, and have that honest conversation. There's no running. There's no tearing up the paper, no burning it... There's no escaping your [bearing witness] to someone's real-time reaction to what you're saying [...] Maybe the words aren't even coming out properly, so you're just hoping that they can feel into the intention of what you're trying to say; regardless of how scared you are, or how muddled what you're trying to say is – whether its to affect your deepest love and devotion, or the bravery which allows you then to say "I love you, but I've got to let you go".

Clearly these instances of immanent experience with another are very important to you, and you seem to invest in them a sort of faith or veracity which the love letter lacks. [...] But equally, these experiences are deeply romantic, and experienced as romantic by both parties – presumably. Among all that romance, that fantasy, is there ever a situation in which you can be truly honest – with yourself or another?

I would say probably not. I just don't think that it's possible, because there's always that ripple effect; you say things, things happen, words are delivered, and regardless you can't control the other person's reaction. Sometimes it's difficult to control your own reaction. I think I've said things which I felt had come from an honest place, which in retrospect where really from a place of fear – that place of contraction. While, in the moment, I thought I was being truthful, I later realised what I said wasn't true. [...] Sometimes you need to take a step back and let the dust settle. A love letter could give you that distance, whilst when you're in the moment, things could spiral or implode [...] I'm not trying to be a pessimist here, but, you know, sometimes things can get away from you before you realise.

Speaking of things getting away from us... Are there any foreseeable conditions in which you'd feel like writing a love letter again? Or, in your current situation, do they seem unnecessary?

What's just dropped in is that the love letter feels almost monumental. Perhaps there is too much pressure on it being this big event, while in actuality it doesn't need to be anything crazy. So then, in further reflection, I write love letters more often than I realise. I just don't call them that because I've not written them with the intention of their being this grand gesture. Instead, they're just simple, sweet gestures. Just something I wanted to do. Perhaps I'd thought they held less value – which isn't true.

Could you give some examples?

I often leave little good-morning messages for my partner. Not because I want anything in return, not because I saw it in a movie and feel the need to replicate it, but purely because I have a scrap of paper in my bag, and I wanted to leave them a note – maybe in hopes that they would find it later and it'd bring a smile to their face. And if it did, mission accomplished. But if not, that's okay too. I don't inherently win or lose anything by doing that; perhaps a little moment of joy thinking about the smile it might bring to their face. And I have heard it does bring a smile to their face, especially if I hide it in their bedroom – maybe under a pillow or next to a stuffed toy I got them...

What is it about hiding them which makes them especially...special?

I just think it adds a little bit of extra fun. Ironically, it prolongs the reception of the love letter. But I guess I'm also trusting that they'll find it when they're meant to. Occasionally they find it immediately – even when I've hidden it, because they know me too well. Sometimes it's days later, in which case I have to fight the urge to tell them, or ask them if they got it [...] It's just kind of playful and fun and... I like the spontaneity...

This raises another question. I'll pose it initially as a binary, but it's absolutely not, or it's not necessarily... Who is the love letter for? Do you write them because you enjoy writing them - and then there's that gratification upon their receiving it? Or is it for your partner? A sort of self-less act of love? Or is it somewhere in-between?

I think it's both, because to give is inherently to receive. I think the moment we deny that, we're lying to ourselves. It's not that anyone owes anybody anything; if having someone owe you is your intention, you've got it a bit skew-whiff. For me, it's a general understanding that what goes around, comes around. So if you lead with intention, that love for me, that vibration, eventually you'll receive it – so long as you're receptive to it. And it might not come directly from your partner. It could come from a stranger on the street who might compliment your hat. And, you know, I suppose I'm lucky enough that I get complimented – honestly – quite often. So I do see the little bit of joy it brings that person when they see the smile it brings to my face. I don't think there's anything wrong with receiving a bit of joy from giving joy to others. If we tell ourselves that that's wrong [...] I think we're doing ourselves a disservice.

We might be going a little off topic, but could you expand on this sort of energetic economy – perhaps economy isn't a word you'd use, but... It sounds like a really interesting conception of an almost universalised movement of energy and investment... Could you elaborate on that, maybe using your notes as a reference?

It's funny you use the word "economy", because talking of giving and receiving, "abundance" has taken on quite an economic connotation in recent times. To be abundant is now to have vast material wealth, which if that's true for you – amazing, incredible. But abundance is a frequency, it's a vibration. It's the ability not to be dysregulated by lack or contraction. With reference to love letters, it's just that feeling of being so overwhelmed and overfull and flowing with love – why wouldn't you gift that to other people? It's where you hold your energy and your frequency. If your energy is sitting at a certain point, you're more likely to run into people at a similar vibration. So if you're feeling expanded, and in a state of euphoria, joy, and bliss, the law of attraction will make it more likely you'll run into people who'll mirror that back to you. And I suppose you could ask the question, "If someone's mirroring that back to you, are they giving that to you?" And I think, in a way, the answer is yes.

Tying it back to the question of love letters,

KATHRYN

in more energetic terms I think intentionality is a big piece of it. Honesty is a very high vibrational frequency. Depending on who you are, depending on what rings true for you, it's arguably a higher vibration than love. It trumps that human, "Hollywood" idea of love. By being incredibly honest in writing, and giving it to someone, allowing them to meet you at that level... [...] There has to be a level of acceptance and understanding, and there has to be that trust. Again, what comes around goes around. So just because you've shared your abundance, your love, your joy, your words of affection and adoration – they might not come back to you directly from that person. They might come back from someone else; a mother, a daughter, a sibling, a father, a passerby [...]

Whilst love is high vibrational, you also said early in this discussion that a love letter can reflect really difficult feelings. Could a love letter meaningfully lower vibration? Or is that a misunderstanding – that instead, the honesty expressed in sharing those difficult feelings will be returned in the long run, even if the immediate situation is painful?

Yes, I suppose whilst the immediate reaction might feel as though it's lowering your vibration – because there's some sort of trigger or contraction – as you say, the greater ripple effect announces something so much better. That's always been my experience; the greatest gift I could give someone is my honesty. In sharing that, I also create a space for them to feel they're able to share in vulnerability – to meet me there. As sometimes hard, confronting, or uncomfortable as that may be, it's inherently high vibrational. Those seemingly denser emotions are not inherently dense [...] You could even argue that something like jealousy, a denser emotion, has its root in insecurity – which is not inherently a [negative] vibration. It's just coming from a lack of love and grace. [...] I don't think – for the most part – there are too many low or negative vibrations. I think it's just the perspective and the unravelling. It's that journey and that unfolding which amounts to that abundance and that overflowing.

Does all this relate to your [artistic] practice?

I work a lot with love. A core foundation of my work, and how I hold myself – which informs the way in which I write love letters – is that love is a key, and love unlocks all. We were talking about the dichotomy of beauty, the polarity of beauty and decay, then that kind of superficial beauty... these are all themes that I navigate in my practice. The understanding of decay, release – the letting go in order to begin again; these are beautiful. My love letters and [...] poetry, these conscious words inform movement [...] It definitely came from a place of understanding love was never meant to confine, or shackle, or burden, or sacrifice. Love is always to unlock, to free, to liberate – those are themes I work with. So, I work with these ideas of hold and release. Hold is that tender embrace [...] affectionate moments, holding hands, or those beautiful hugs under willow trees. Hold can also be the most painful thing we can experience; if we hold on to a relationship too long, that touch can burn and scar [...] Release can be the greatest gift, the greatest love letter we write ourselves, and the greatest gift we can give another person [...] Additionally, the ideas of submerge and emerge are quite similar. I'm currently working with the idea of metamorphosis – how painful it is, but also the beauty in becoming. And the beauty of allowing our loved ones to hold us in that chrysalis state; as uncomfortable as that can be, as much as we want to push them away, letting them be there for us... In my own way, I've written a million-and-one love letters to the people I love. Wanting to push them away, wanting to give them every single possible out - because that seems easier - but being met by grace; compassion for how messy I am, how messy I can be [...] That's the greatest gift that I've received in writing my love letters, and writing my honesty [...]

It sounds as though all this requires a great deal of sensitivity. By that, I don't just mean a sensitivity towards others, but a sensitivity cultivated in yourself such that you might then process these experiences. Without any pressure to relate it to love letters, I wonder how you develop that sensitivity to love, and what that sensitivity allows to emerge in your practice?

It's so funny that you've used the word sensitive, because when I was young, it was always a word used against me; "You're too sensitive, you're too fragile". You know?

Well, there's a degree to which sensitivity, even fragilization are important – you must make yourself vulnerable to the Other if you're to develop meaningful relationships...

That's exactly my experience. I think I heard that, [which] I perceived as criticism for such a long time, and let it harden me. I thought being sensitive was a flaw [...] I had to be strong, I had to harden myself [...] I was just numb, indifferent, I didn't feel anything. I got to a point in my life where I was so unhappy, and I couldn't understand what was happening, and it took literally falling down a flight of stairs to understand that I wasn't living life to the fullest; that actually, what I'd learnt to perceive as strength was only weakness. To be strong you must be sensitive. To be strong is not to harden yourself, it's not putting on your armour and going to battle. It's not putting your armour on, rocking up [...] with your arms open wide [...] An example I use a lot is the sword. People perceive the sword as a weapon, as something to cause harm, but the weapon was always meant to reflect back upon us – our own hurts, our own egos [...] I love the tales of Excalibur, and the myths of Arthur – who was such a gracious leader. I think that's where that sentiment comes from.

But the greatest gift I've ever given myself was... every time I felt like trying not to cry, or refusing to say I'm not okay, I still move forward without denying how I feel. [I walk] with it, rather than away from it [...] This too shall pass [...] I'm walking hand in hand with this emotion [...] this feeling won't always be here, even if it's happiness, or joy, [...] or grief, or sadness, or anger [...] The more I've honoured that [sensitivity], and cracked myself open again and again... this is my [...] experience of feeling the fullness of love. Each time I reach the ceiling of what I think and feel love to be, it cracks me open [...] and humbles me. It ignites this whole new layer of feeling and expression, and quite honestly it takes some time to re-calibrate and understand that I'm not dying. The world is not collapsing beneath my feet. I am allowed to feel the full spectrum of love, and it comes

with some incredible highs and also the absolute deepest depths [...]

I like to see the echoes and the mythos of that throughout human time. I remind myself of those figures like Persephone, Ishtar, and the Goddess Isis; I find some comfort in their descent to the underworld – it's not being a bad thing, just part of the journey [...] The walking of the seven layers of the ego – I suppose I find some comfort in that as well. It's been an incredible journey, and I know that I have so much further to go; reminding myself not to harden my armour, to keep dropping it at the altar. I always have this visual in my head of a love letter I wrote myself, about dropping my armour at the altar, and no longer having to be the big, strong, brave person anymore. Then, when I see what that inevitably gifts others – when I'm teary in a meeting, or when I'm vulnerable with a partner – I'm reminded that being sensitive is being strong.

Is there a difference between a love letter you'd give yourself, and one you'd send someone else?

For a long time, love – for me – was something that had to be earned; love in others, love from others... When I understood that that wasn't true, I started giving back to myself. This reckoning – as I often refer to it – was honestly the best experience of my life. Falling down that flight of stairs. I've been gifting to myself over and over, witnessing how, in giving to myself, writing these love letters to myself, that is inherently giving to others. I always thought I had to martyr myself upon the sword in order for people to know and appreciate that they are loved and that they are so loved by me. But again, the greatest gift that I can give, the ones that I love, is being the butterfly releasing; letting go, flying the coop, spreading my wings and letting them see I'm alright in my sensitivity; in my seeing, doing, experiencing everything that I ever wanted to do. They never wanted me to shrink myself, to make myself small. It's unfortunate that I ever thought that was the case [...] I now just get to gift myself, [thereby] inherently giving to others. But on a more human level, [I've] always loved gifting to others. I'm just such a chronic people pleaser. I always love making sure people know how much they are loved and cared for [...] I'm always thinking of them, and even if I can't buy them a nice shiny car or those more tangible things, I can hold them in grace, hold them in light. Then I know I can sleep well.

I was in a long-term relationship. We lived together, we had talked about children, we were engaged. We had this idealised life plan; where we wanted to travel, all that. We were both very esoteric, spiritual people, so at the time it was very important for us to go and travel the world; undergo these sacred pilgrimages, find mentorship. So, we were [going to] this retreat in Bali, which is a deeply heart-centred land, and we'd had a conversation where we agreed that if things didn't shift – especially in me, where I was, this deep sense of unhappiness – we'd call it quits and take a break. With that, we went to Bali [...]

As soon as [the retreat] started, it was as if we'd entered a whole new realm. We had become these polite strangers, or beautiful acquaintances. We knew each other's histories, but we were there only for the purposes of returning to ourselves. We'd just undergone this meditation called 'The Universal Love Frequency', and I remember so many people having profound experiences. I was no beginner to meditation, so I was frustrated that they saw and felt all these beautiful things - it was absolute crickets for me. [I was] so angry.

We'd had weird and beautiful weather the first couple days, but as soon as the retreat started it just rained and rained and rained, which felt oddly poetic. There was some kind of divine synchronicity in that - rain represents emotional release. So I'd had it in my head to be aware everything was slippery; walk slowly, be aware of what you're doing... But I was so in my head that I as I walked down this flight of stairs, my feet just kind of went out from under me. I landed at the bottom of the stairs completely unharmed. I didn't have a bruise or a scratch, nothing. It was purely ego. My ego was bruised, and humbled. But it didn't stop there. I was in my head about being in my head, meditating on the meditation I didn't feel I'd [truly] experienced, and I knocked over a glass of water.

I'm not a clumsy person. Every time I've injured myself, hurt myself or broken something, it's always at a very pivotal moment where I've just been holding onto too much energy. So I clocked that, and the number two [...] That glass clearly represents something... My dear soul sister had just done an oracle reading, and I was asking her about my life direction. I vaguely mentioned that I was considering breaking up with my partner, I kind of wanted to move to the UK, kind of wanted to pursue art – all these very big questions. Later, we were preparing for a final ceremony that night, and I fell over again. It was right in front of everyone. I felt clearly that the universe was telling me something, and I'm not listening – and I've probably not been listening for longer than I'd like to admit.

The next day, this beautiful iridescent blue butterfly cascaded from the ceiling during an evening self-marriage ceremony [...] We wrote vows for ourselves, we'd pick a ring from this bowl to give ourselves [...] After I did my vows, this butterfly fell down into the drain. So not only did it fall at nighttime from the ceiling, it fell into the drain, and I remember saying to myself "I won't let you die in this drain". And just like that, it was as if the universe was giving me permission, "Don't die in this cage you've built for yourself". I rescued the butterfly and it flew off. But a couple hours later, after the ceremony, after I hadn't honoured a single thing I'd wanted to say in it [...] I found [the butterfly] face down. I put it in the middle of the altar, and it passed. It was at that moment I knew. This was my metamorphosis. Things needed to change. I couldn't keep going that way, or it would be more than just falling over and breaking a glass. [...] So, I got back home, [and we] integrated a couple weeks later; we had a spontaneous conversation, and here I am - two years later, living in London, in a very different relationship, pursuing my passions. I still have this recurring image of the butterfly; this idea that love isn't being quiet, it's sharing your truth – love is sometimes the most painful thing. And that's beautiful.

KATHRYN