



2019

TRUE GIRL: *an anthology*

Edited by Katharine Diehl Cortese and Sarah V Diehl

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"I've seen women insist on cleaning everything in the house before they could sit down to write... and you know it's a funny thing about housecleaning... it never comes to an end. Perfect way to stop a woman. A woman must be careful to not allow over-responsibility (or over-respectability) to steal her necessary creative rests, riffs, and raptures. She simply must put her foot down and say no to half of what she believes she "should" be doing. Art is not meant to be created in stolen moments only." - Clarisa Pinkola Estes



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Editor's Note

KATIE

Sometimes sisters dream the same dream. It happened to me and Sarah only once; we dreamed the same dream about a deer hit by a car. For this issue, I told Sarah I was going to condense my Peter Pan paper and ended up writing about our brother. She told me she was writing about the transcendentalists and ended up writing about him too.

One is sometimes two when it's twins or sisters. Or me and you- I feel I have a kinship with you, the reader, because I am sure you have a piece of art buried very deep inside you and you haven't been told to excavate it yet. Or keelhaul it up, peel off barnacles, take its measure.

Anne Boyer writes about not writing in her book *Garments Against Women*. How many years did I spend not writing that Peter Pan essay? Years spent writing around it? As many years as I spent writing it? Beginning with the musical, ending when I left tourmaline under a tree in Scotland for the fairies? What have I been writing when I haven't been writing, and what about you? Creating when you haven't been, actually; weaving together in the back of your head, shaping with the palms of your hands, when you've been engaged in other activities?

Have the years been unkind to you, or kind? What kinds of silences have you borne, and perhaps found almost intolerable? What happiness do you carry on your back? What is your past to you- "a bindle or a hump?"

I ask these questions to prime you for this collection. There are some dark and difficult things, and some beautiful and joyful things, and some funny things, and more poetry than either of us expected. Therapists say they "hold space" for their clients; Sarah and I understand ourselves as vessels, imperfect, but happy to carry this water with you and for you, until we all find a place to set it down.

Katie (2/28/2019)

Editor's Note

SARAH

Children are encouraged to self-express. They color, they dance, they role-play adulthood. Since I was homeschooled this encouragement continued throughout elementary school. Thus the original True Girl was born, a magazine of near unadulterated self-expression and thought, growing in maturity as we and our friends grew. Fitting then, that True Girl died as the daily burdens of college, then career, then family, took precedence over creativity and even over careful self-examination.

Ten years later we're back and we want to see you. Since 2009 I have been looking for a way back into a world where the pursuit of creativity and knowledge is not a job title, but an integral part of my identity. I start projects; they die. I write an idea down; I lose it. It's a complicated dance, taking time in the inbetween to work on projects that feel more true to myself than what I do in the main hours of the day.

So then -- in your inbetweens -- what has adulthood created in you? How have you expressed yourself and your talents, despite of or because of the responsibilities of life that so easily take us over? We want to see you.

There are eighteen women represented in this anthology, and from the outside it seems like a mixed bag of materials. What do we really have in common at this point in life, other than the fact that we're all women? Except... that's all that held the original True Girl together. Girlhood was the theme, simply by virtue of the fact that we were all girls. We didn't set out to explore girlhood, but we were girls, so... the venn diagram is a circle, and so on.

I recently read the *Penelopeiad* by Margaret Atwood and I remembered all over again that strange sisterhood that we women share. A universal language, a pain, a truth that we know. There are things we share that are subtle, primal, yet instantly recognizable. My hope is that our disjointed passion project is filled with the *je ne sais quoi* of what it means to be a woman.

This anthology showcases our stories and surveys who we are today. Good and bad. Careers and hobbies. Fact and fiction. Success and survival. Reader, I hope True Girl puts on display the vast ability of women as *creators*, in whatever discipline we pursue. Katie and I hope you find inspiration and solace in its contents.

Sarah (3/10/2019)



i. poetry



Joan of Arc Cycle

Katharine Diehl Cortese

Violence transfixes her.

Rigid before us like a standard
Our virginal Joan bore in battle.
A vision of a harmless certain snake,
The kingdom of God lying coiled blue and gold.
They made her hands still themselves
So what was embedded
Would not unfurl itself.

Killing Joan

Medieval time had been sacred time, until
The days in your cell. The days grow inward now.
Grew evil. And you in your suit of arms sewn in.
Made perfect in your eighteenth year.

Be thou my Joan at every hour, at the hour
Of death, the hour you blessed.
(It was the final question put to you and ah
You answered nobly.) To know as much as you,

To be perfected as you were would be
Knowledge terrible. To know the smell and shape
Of your fate- you later flamed with it.
Seraphic. The color of foxfur.
Heaven's raiments rent over it.

The satan

I was thrown in the path of another, the one we call the adversary.
The hellknight held me hard in the bars, in the arms,
The slanderer accused me.

I was instructed to hand over my body.
A part to be apportioned to God and part to my ancestry-
This too was a lie.

I called for Joan at my trial to stand by me
And she opened her wrists to feed me.

Two Joans

Poor Joan, to be burned twice,
Then cast in the Seine. This was done to Joan
To rob girls of a chance to emulate,
To take from them an object to venerate.
Redeemed by history entirely
Too late to save her: not a St. Theresa,
But probed for her virginity.
Joan: the tipping point of history.

Venerary, a Joan reliquary
Would be any smoking rifle, or any visionary
Who will not wring her hands in patient
Sufferance, as discipline, for the day.
Joan, not man nor god, but nearly as good.
Joan is packing. I say to you, there is little comfort
To be had but one: Joan has a gun.

SIX POEMS



1. Eclipse 8.21.17

In one moment
that began with I Am
we small and feeble gazed,
Heads thrown back, a laugh dropping out,
At the sky surrounding our world.

The power to blind with heat and awe and
majesty gave only a
Sliver of
Reality,
Manifested, tangible reality,
to that moment in past and present
When humanity would gaze on the face of
the Creator in joyous fear unlike anything felt
within the body of a creature for and in all of
creation and time.

This is the day I saw Adam and Eve waiting in
the garden;
this is the day I glimpsed redemption, in the
shadow of a solar system and universe and

infinite, never ending blood dripping and dropping down
Down
To cover me whole in a love
more vast, and more real,
than all the stars and moons combined.

2. UNTITLED 5.13.17

Something broke open
within me

That evening in the humid air
You kissed me, soft and blooming

Down from my mouth, it radiated out, across
my skin and up in to my hair

Then jolting deep inside my chest
It landed and nestled there.

My skin felt numb, your limbs went weak
And as if out of a fog

I finally saw the world around me;
It needed you, and that was all.

3. UNTITLED 12.2.17

I am fragile and
my ribs are cracking
pieces are fractured and they drift
through my lungs
pricking my blood stream
And pulsing across my heart

Last night I saw a comet shoot across the
sky
And I forgot to pray with fragile lips
to the Keeper of my
whimpering conscious
Wave the cigarette smoke away from my
eyes and push me back to stare at the stars
from this Manhattan rooftop

This is my home, my dreamland
A fish pond from the cosmos
That has turned me inward to depths of
violent seclusion

In that moment are all moments
as city blocks of old and new time brush
against one another
like shy, former lovers

And out there a lifetime away
I sadly love Brooklyn
with its growing pains
of which I still cry in deep places of my heart
for that girl I was and became

What if, like feathers, my bone were lightly
spread
at each spot I ever stood in this place
all along the river and up on the rock
you would see a small, dull white splinter
as the city demands a sacrifice
and I gave it with my love

4. UNTITLED 7.7.17

Sometimes my hands look like music
as I bend each finger in perfect unison, at
work or while stroking your back.

I'm alone tonight and I've brought the chaos
to rest with me in my room; it swirls in a half
circle; it rests on the floor by my bed.

The emotions are the same; they crescendo,
they lilt over messy, messy, m e s s y plans in
my mind.

Perhaps if all life was, if I could live in that
moment
Of being music
And stroking your skin

Your name is grand and your figure is central
to my mind's eye now. The notes of the
letters in each sound of your perfect call are
orderly and spacious. They swell with such
feeling I never knew I didn't know.

The mess is circling. As I walk down the
streets and crash and crumble in to the dark
subway. I cried as I walked home alone
tonight, for this lonely place is as much
home as I've come to know since I moved so
far, far away.

Perhaps I have much to learn about sound
and my heart and roofs over heads and the
tone my finger makes in circling again and
again and again...

5. UNTITLED 1.20.17

Jagged, off center
Twist in small holes.
What's that around my neck? A cloth, a line.
I wrap it around my shoulders and button up
As the morgue is opened.

Over 100 years of bodies lie in eternal wake
As women in white wrap them daily in cotton
And lull them to sleep with tissue and gentle
caress.

The child, the lover
They walk by and sigh and remember
The crush of tulle, the scratch of yards
of silk.

What phantom hands have touched each of
these swathed angels?

One in friendship,
one in violence,
one in defeat, one in refusal,
one in bereavement,
one in everlasting bliss.

And we are the caregivers
And for all our days we watch
(the stillborn, the war torn, the bride, the muse)
the dead live again.

6. UNTITLED 9.5.18

You sing out the back of your neck
Broken, tired and alone.
Funny how in an instant you become someone.

Once a man touches you.

In an instant your whole body takes on a
new shape and form and meaning;
to your eyes and the eyes inside and the
windows
to your soul,
you see yourself differently.

You look back on who you saw before or
in the past
and she seems so

small.

And perhaps now you are still small. But it
is in a wiser way.

No?
Perhaps more sad, perhaps tragic,
but perhaps

fulfilled? Perhaps.

You saw yourself as legs and breasts
but after a lost hour,
you ask the sky,

“Now what?”



two poems
j.c. byrd

1

today
today is unremarkable,
ordinary,
a day like many others with no celebration or excitement to set it apart
but today
today i softened my sight just so
and so many bright things struck me
the slant of the light across the grass
the rich blue beyond me
the slow dance of stars and the biggest moon i've ever seen
the velvet twinkle of my daughter's eyes
and her dimpled, trusting hand in mine

2

when the morning light touches the branches of these mighty oaks
open-palm leaves
luminescent with worship
it is as if they have been growing for a thousand years
always
and I am growing too
bright
listless
bones creaking
smelting
undone by beauties too expensive
too numerous to count



One Poem / Kelly Uhler

When your palms press to mine
And our fingers interlock
I'm reminded of roots
Reminded of
The strength
Of past days
When our strands
And radicles
Found each other
And interlocked so fervently
And purposefully
Binding us two together
It would take 100 lifetimes to
Undo these fibers
This intricate network of us
No man could tear
Nor could anyone
Comprehend how deep our roots
Yawn and stretch out
Far below the surface
When my fingers touch your face
I trace the desert
The wind and sun and dirt blessed you with
the soft lines that caress your eyes cracked vintage leather
These caverns of you
Are home to me now
With your every smile
The caverns widen deeper
They settle further back into you
Preserved
One fragment at a time dear
this progression of you
Is precious to me
It is not like
Observing the sun rise
No, it is the countdown
until New Year's Day
On Dec 31, 1999
My mother woke me to witness
A new era birthed and
Each passing moment with you
Is a new era to me
Each passing second
Is a new millennium
I could spend all of forever
Binding myself to you
As roots do
And I know
You'll bind yourself twice as tightly
To me



A STUDY ON DISAPPOINTMENT II
MARINA PALENY

God talks to me through my body
the aching bones all over,
the shortness of breath in crisis,
the turbulent, thunderous heart
stinging my chest out of the blue:
all signs that tell me, stop
(and I'm not used to stopping)

God is breaking a few bones too,
severing ties that took years to grow in,
carving aggressive malignancies
out of my brain,
and I'm angry and disoriented,
feeling incapacitated, deprived—
feeling the sharp cold scalpel edges,
sterile, impersonal
and I am the *etherized patient on the table*

all of it hurts before it heals
if it does indeed heal
(in glory)

and when will I learn to not
take my anger so personally —
this contamination upon my otherwise
consecrated person?
when will I receive it as my own:
much as the stutter in my breath,
a perfectly human reaction
of a body in defense?

but no, I must be the withholding stoic
I must remain untouched in my self-inflicted *purity,
archiving all of my past rejected selves
that I am not prepared to acknowledge
out of embarrassment for my parents

and yet I'm forced by circumstance
to return to my familiar humanity—
acid in my mouth,
feet dragging as usual
back to the flaws that shatter me

what could He want me to do
with all this disappointment?
the overwhelming questions that gather moths,

to let myself look it in the face
and speak the truth into the void
of all my misdoubt,
to say the things I only hope in
delicately, feebly

(long enough to see what happens.)



II. MEMOIR





MY WHITE BIRD A BOOK, HERS A [



KATHARINE DIEHL CORTESE



In 1642 the Presbyterian minister Robert Kirk of Aberfoyle, Scotland, was spirited away by the fairies and imprisoned in a large pine on the top of Doon Hill. I know this because I have seen his grave in a kirk graveyard – covered in shiny pennies – and have left rocks at his tree as an offering or bargain, as have others other the years. There is a rope wrapped around the tree and people tie clouties to it.

Kirk was a kind of anthropologist; he spoke with his parishioners, the Highland folk, and carefully chronicled their experiences with second sight and the charms they used against ill-will. He wrote a defense of their gifts and included a taxonomy of the fairy folk, halfway between demon and mortal, morally neutral, elemental spirits. They are invisible to the untrained eye yet the landscape seethes with their energies. I have read *The Secret Commonwealth*, which argues that fairies are a sad people, perhaps because the state of their salvation is unknown until the end of days; when they grin it is like a “mort-head,” a death-head grimace.

Kirk collapsed from what was probably a stroke shortly after writing *The Secret Commonwealth*. Some maintained it was a punishment from the fairies who did not think it kind of him to reveal their secrets. On my trip to Scotland I was eager to make this pilgrimage, and left onyx and tourmaline (for protection and grounding, my wish and my plea). Unlike God, who requires complete surrender, these minor elementals and local spirits require an exchange.

*

I am mostly interested in fairies because my brother died young. “Come away o human child! To the waters and the wild with a faery, hand in hand. For the world’s more full of weeping than you can understand” wrote Yeats. Fairies are associated with purity and childhood innocence; they are also dangerous, snatching vulnerable children and leaving horrific changelings in their wake; they preside over transitions, birth and marriage and death. In Gaelic cultures they were called the *Sleight*, the army of the undead climbing the Lyke path towards the stars. They were the *good people*, called so out of fear as much as respect. They had to be bargained with.

When you are young and someone you love dies, you begin to engage in “magical thinking.” You bargain. You make bets with the universe. You think, what if I walked into this room and he was suddenly there. I can sense it. I can see him and feel his presence. I will open the door. He will be restored to us. I will count to ten and he will be restored to us. For my child psychology class in my first semester of undergrad, I wrote a paper about bereavement therapies, which was entirely too on the nose and also too late to be useful to me. You can predict roughly how children will react to death based on their age. My sister and I were in different developmental categories. He was her friend; I felt responsible for him.

If you have lost someone you love, if your life is so ruptured, you may begin to experience the dead loved one as frozen in time. Your memory may crystallize, or grow like mother-of-pearl around the irritant. You will experience time as an uncanny loop, or maybe separate timelines running simultaneously. In one the boy has been dead for years. In another, perhaps he has just died, as if for the first time, always for the first time. In another, he persists in memory. He grows and flourishes. He watches *Pirates of the Caribbean* with you when you are 14 and he is 11, he has guy friends and you make them all popcorn, he walks down the aisle at your wedding. This disturbance of time is characteristic of trauma and its related disorders.

*

My little lost boy; is it any wonder I wrote my undergraduate thesis about Peter Pan? Like me, author J. M. Barrie lost a brother very young. He surprised his mother one day by dressing in that dead brother's clothing and visiting her in her room to try and cheer her up. Perhaps Peter is that dead brother. I read a lot of academic literature that suggested it was so. This explains his affinity with the fairies, the "sluagh" or undead. He is a psychopomp for the Lost Boys, and he can never grow up because he can never grow at all. He will always be "gay, innocent, and heartless." This is also the logic of trauma.

My favorite metaphor for Peter is the "little white bird." Birds were symbols for Barrie of something deeply and profoundly desired. If you've seen *Finding Neverland* you know a bit about the Llewelyn-Davies boys who he adopted after their parents died. When their mother Sylvie gave birth to her son Michael, he wrote in his diary, "my white bird a book, hers a baby." He wrote that he hoped the dead were not as "a bird taking lonely flight" but "one of a great flock of birds."

You may know that Peter Pan the character was first introduced in Barrie's novel *The Little White Bird*. He is a bird-boy who fell out of his carriage and had to make a home in Kensington Gardens, adopted by a bird named Solomon who names him "poor little half-and-half." Being half-bird and half-boy, Peter sometimes behaves "more like a bird than a boy...only a betwixt-and-between." In the mythos of *The Little White Bird*, birds are generally associated with children, because all babies begin as birds. The little boy David, who is told the story of Peter Pan, remembers that "he had lain in bed planning to escape... very itchy at the shoulders, where his wings used to be." So Peter never had a chance to outgrow his bird-stage. We learn that swallows particularly "are the spirits of little children who have died," who sometimes "try to fly in at a nursery window." Shades of the later Peter, who hovers at the Darlings' nursery; the swallow is the "bird of return," and so is Peter.

*

My thesis was long and confused. This is the way I write: slowly accruing evidence like a magpie picking over trinkets. This is why I write poetry; dissonance is expected. Brother Edward OSF, one of my readers, kindly wrote to me that while my work "bordered on overwhelming," there was a French term for what I was attempting. *Conjointure*. "It is complex

and promotes truculence. It is how medieval romances were organized. It suggests that no narrative is linear, rather they all veer, spin, reflect, and deflect the different *attachments* which are part of the whole.”

What are my attachments, my allegiances? To art. To family and family traumas. To the Divine. The fairy troubles each of these. The green fairy of absinthe, the divine trances – artists questing for their Xanadus. The fairy steals children and returns them home a hundred years in the future, disoriented, unmoored in time. And so we tell children fairy tales so they understand how to become human, because to be fairy is to be feral. Fairy tales are warnings. Writers and poets who seek a way in, who trance themselves with alcohol and the fairy glamour, are liable to disappear.

Kirk wrote the status of the fairy’s immortal soul is uncertain. Perhaps they, like animals and not like angels, are not burdened with immortal souls. I have wondered if the fairy is a container for my anxieties about these and other spiritual questions. If we expect a general, bodily resurrection, will my brother remain five years old forever? If his cancer is healed, will it be as if it never was? Who would he be then?

*

Psychoanalysis textualizes childhood. And my childhood was always mediated by the written word. I imagine many homeschooled young women can say the same. In writing that thesis, back in 2013, I experienced a series of confrontations. I had to wrestle with certain things I had not yet decided or resolved, about the nature of art and the creative process, about loss and how it reverbs through time and space and into the pages of a book.

I wrote the thesis arguing for, and then against, the general psychoanalytic argument that Peter is Barrie, or Wendy is Barrie’s mother. If we consider it like Freud a given that all art is symptomatic, what of a career? If a homeschooler gets a master’s degree in educational psychology, what are we to think of it? If a woman who was abused by her parents as a child turns to social work, what are we to conclude? In the words of Kirk, there is no such thing as a pure wilderness on earth. These subterranean inhabitants inhabit every cave, every hollow; there is no way to escape them, though without the gift of the second sight, who could know it?

Every thesis needs a conclusion, and here is my best attempt. Asymptote-like, it approaches but cannot converge on resolution in this world. Kirk’s grave is loved and tended well, and though he was not gifted with a second sight, he had the gift of vision. In an age of witch trials and modernity’s superstitions, he saw and heard his parishioners and recorded them without judgment. This kind of careful attention is an act of love, and love is the thing in us that touches the Divine, as the saints agree. I love my brother and continue my one-sided relationship with him. In the end I would like to consider that thesis an act of love, more than pathology; and sometime the veil between us will be lifted. Ubi amor, ibi oculus.



... moving on ... rachel alvarado

Up until about two weeks ago, I was leaning in, breaking ground. I was the only woman in the United States working as a camera crane operator. Then I quit.

I worked in the movies -- making films, art, cinema, "movie magic." Friends at parties and strangers at bars complimented me on having such a creative job, but I haven't considered myself creative for quite some time. I was always drawn to the technical side of filmmaking, the building and the problem solving. For several years I worked as a grip, the mechanics of the film world. I didn't have the childhood memories of fixing cars with my dad, or the machine shop experience most of my male co-workers did, but I was learning. Still, I worried I didn't have what it takes. I didn't have what they had.

The opportunity to work with cranes fell into my lap unexpectedly. I jumped at the chance to do something so specialized and unique, and at the chance to break ground and defy what's expected of women in film. I thought about the women in the 70s and 80s on set who had to break really hard ground. They broke it for me, so I could get the chance to operate cranes in 2014. They had to give blow jobs in the back of trucks or be fired, but they broke the ground for me. Now, we were allowed to be grips. We were allowed to be electricians and even camera technicians too. "The camera department always likes to have their token pussy" -- my co-worker Sal's thoughts on the subject.

Then, one night at work, I was moved. A co-worker planted his fat hands on either side of my waist, firmly gripped, and moved me. It was utterly non-sexual. I don't remember which of the four guys it was who had been assigned to help me do my job. I'd only just met all of them that day, and he was behind me, so I couldn't tell who he was. Maybe it was Tony, but it could have been Vince or Mike. Tony was the one who annoyed me the most so it's him I imagine in my head when I think of being moved. My feet did not leave the ground, but I was definitely moved; slid to one side.

"Watch out," was what he said as he moved me.

It was a night shot on an HBO pilot, corner of 80th and Central Park East, with the MET in the background. I was working the 60' Movie Bird, the biggest crane on the east coast, and the other crane tech had just been called away. His son had broken his arm and he had to go. The 60' is a two man job, always. But now I was with it alone, no men in sight as the four were sent over to help me do my job. They were from the grip department, sent to help me in light of the other tech's departure. All in their 50s, with gray hair and calloused hands, and easily 100 years of film set experience between them. But none of them really knew how to work the 60'. It was the last shot of the night before we could all go home; it was winter, and we were all cold. The camera operator was sick as a dog and definitely should've been in bed. Her name was the same as mine, though she was 20 years my senior. I'm sure she had broken ground for me someday or somehow.

I had spent the twenty minutes prior to being moved arguing with the four as they attempted to balance the crane incorrectly.

"In order to balance you need to extend." I repeated again and again. "You only get an accurate sense if you extend."

"No, it's fine," each one replied as they swarmed every side of the crane, stripping weight after weight, wrongly.

“Without 25 on each side, it could tip over.”

“25? On each side?” For some reason, they had respect for that number; 25. They stopped to count. The thought of 10,000 lbs see-sawing out of control unnerved them. Three weights too short. “So we need to extend?” they asked.

“Yes, extend! You can’t balance a crane unless you extend.”

Tony pressed the button and the crane lengthened outward over the street. I felt the balance as it crept out and slapped on more weights until the monster reached equilibrium and held still. Unrestrained, no longer manhandled, it floated over the taxis heading southbound, gravity keeping it perfectly still. It was ready to go. The drama of the balancing act was behind us. I’d been right, but it was quickly forgotten. The camera was high in the sky on the very end of the crane, rolling.



(Rachel and her crane)

Then, I was moved. A slow drip of cold, smooth righteous anger slid over my face and down my arms. Similar to the anxiety that sometimes drips down each arm on certain days. The anxiety that tells me I just don’t have what it takes.

“One, two, three, four, five,” I counted in my head to keep myself from saying something I would regret. “Did you just *move* me, motherfucker?” Is what first came to mind, but instead I chose to count and take deep breaths. The word truly was “moved.” Not nudged, not shoved, not eased, but decidedly and deliberately moved. Part of me thinks I was moved because I had been right, and he was annoyed. But I can’t prove it, and maybe I’m imagining it because I’m angry.

I move cranes, giant pieces of highly technical equipment, from point A to point B. I balance them, extend them, retract them, and try not to get moved myself in the process. I load them in and out of trucks, I clean the hydraulic oil from their leaky valves. And like I was doing that night, I spend much of the day clearing the coffee cups and soda cans that are left on the crane base before they can tip over and spill, making everything sticky. “It’s a crane, not your personal table.” I jokingly remind my everyone when they leave cups for me to clean. Sometimes I clean so I look busier than I am.

“You’ll never be more than the girl who cleans coffee cups off of cranes,” Sal told me. “It’s sad, but they just don’t respect you enough to give you real responsibilities.”

I know he meant well when he told me this -- he was trying to tell me a hard truth. But motive aside, he said those exact words to my face.

My response to him was, “If I have to be that girl today, so that years from now some other girl can be more, that’s okay.” But of course, it hurt. It really hurt. But I was leaning in, breaking ground.

I quit my job two weeks ago. I couldn’t take it anymore. I couldn’t break the ground. To be honest, I don’t want to anymore and I’m sick of being moved. I don’t have what it takes. That statement to me used to be one of defeat, but now, it’s slowly becoming one of relief. I didn’t “show them I really could,” or stick it to them. I suppose in some ways I got moved and didn’t resist. Some days I still feel guilty, like a failure, like I let my sisters down. Some women who are moved crawl back and take up their place again. They dig down with deep unmovable roots, that grow old and strong and are seldom torn up. I used to crawl. And I realize I could have grown roots and stuck it out. But they would have sucked my soul dry. I don’t have what it takes, and while I thank God some women do, that’s my new source of pride. It’s a phrase I’ve chosen to reclaim -- that I don’t have what it takes. I’ll rebrand it, like the generation of women before me did with the word “bitch.” Because frankly, “what it takes” is obscene. “It” asks too much and I’m not sure “it” even exists. In walking away, I’m declaring that I refuse to be moved. If they cannot reach me, they cannot move me. I am choosing self preservation and I’m not sorry. Their loss. I’m done and I’m moving on.

The sea was my sister's

Sarah Diehl



When I was a child I almost drowned in a lake. I was younger than my sister, weaker. I was trying to keep pace with friends. I was flailing and a lifeguard saved me. It is the common metaphor -- death to life. Psalm 38:4 says, "For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me."

When you have a close sister, there is only so much room for shared interests and habits. I was bears, she was birds. I was Martha, she was Mary. I was images, she was words. I was land, she was sea. I was life, she was death. Yet I was the one who almost drowned.

Life through metaphor and story is second nature for me, for my family as a whole, I would dare to say. We all know our signs, our tarots, our elements, and we stick to them as to not create confusion. I am earth, Katie is water, Benjamin is fire, Hannah is air or perhaps better seen as wands. Our lost brother, Daniel, does not get an element. If he had a tarot perhaps it would be death, for as Carl Jung, the 19th century psychoanalyst says "every transformation demands as its precondition 'the ending of a world' - the collapse of an old philosophy of life." That is the death card, which is really the transformation card. And it was death that transformed our family, gave us a new philosophy of life. Or maybe we were also this elemental - we'll never know.

I did not choose to be land. But the sea was my sister's, so I was land. I have a deep love for the sea: the pull of the ocean, the call to death and drowning, but it was never mine to own. As an element, the sea stands for the unconscious according to Jung. Henry David Thoreau, author of *Walden*, called it a symbol of the unchanging as it is "equally wild and unfathomable" as a thousand years ago. I am the sister who is afraid of change, but I am also the one afraid of what I cannot control. Land may change but it can be controlled, harnessed and ploughed. Its seasons are cyclical. Man can take back the land as he can never do of the seas. And in that sense, I am land.

*

I am drawn to the Transcendentalists, their almost wiccan belief that God is seen in and through nature and ourselves. Emerson and Thoreau believed that everything you needed to live a full life could be found wherever you were planted. This fealty to hearth and home is described when Thoreau said, "If a man is rich and strong anywhere, it must be on his native soil. Here I have been these forty years learning the language of these fields that I may the better express myself. [...] Many a weed here stands for more of life to me than the big trees of California would if I should go there." I am land and so I love my native lands. I do not feel the pull of the German *wanderlust*; my German word of choice is *gemütlich*, meaning "homey." Likewise Emerson said, "Who are you that have no task to keep you at home? He that does not fill a place at home, cannot abroad." I fill my place at home, and my home is my land.

If my brother's death sent my sister adrift at sea, it planted me in my native lands -- the open skies of Brooklyn. This love for my homeland, this terror of change, has rooted itself deep inside me. If I am earth, in tarot I am coins. Coins can be warm, maternal, overflowing. Or they can be stingy, greedy. Or they can be impoverished, empty. I tend to a four of coins. Literary critic and professional card reader Jessa Crispin says the card is "essentially, Austerity." Crispin reads her card's imagery. "In my deck, a woman clings to her four coins, arms wrapped tightly around them. She sneaks an anxious glance over her shoulder, back towards the city walls. Fours are stable, but stable like the four right angles of my room, tight and confining."

And I believe that is my oxymoron. I am hearth and home but I am also austerity. I'm a hearth, but I can be a cold ember. I am severe because I am bad at mourning. I am not the sea -- I do not let grief wash me over. I crystalize pain into a rock and keep it somewhere in my gut. My dad and I were discussing what to do with my 18 year old cat when she dies. In a living example of the way I carry my pain, I researched companies which turn your loved ones' ashes into a glass stone. I have a lot of glass stones in my gut. One for every death, failed relationship, or lost friendship. I will not spread grief, akin to ashes, in the winds, let the sea wash them up and down the shoreline. I will turn my grief into a possession to be kept, hidden, worn. Like the women in the four of coins -- two arms circling a coin in opposite directions -- sitting between heart and gut.

When I first read *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier as a thirteen year old, I uncovered my four of coins. When I read it - that was the moment when I realized I would gladly sell my soul for a beautiful house. My deepest desire, security. Recently, in a letter about the four of coins, Crispin compares the tarot to the stories of *Rebecca*, *Pride and Prejudice* and the newer *Crazy Rich Asians*. "[These stories] are a love story between a woman and a house. But this is Four of Coins energy. Prizing security and comfort over all else, without noticing how hunched it makes you." When I was thirteen I knew I'd sell my soul for comfort. I still would. My greed is for security. It sustains me.

*

I have a hard heart. Ezekiel 36:26 says, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." I sometimes feel I am still waiting for my new heart. It'd be my third heart. The heart of my childhood was soft, a little too soft. I cried at picture books, nursery rhymes, a stuffed bear with a sad face. I was "little Sarah." When it became clear that my sister was the sea, and that I needed to be land, my heart began to harden. It became a glass stone, filled with the ashes of whatever was lost. I needed to be land, and also a shore, something for others to wash up on. I could not erode. Therefore -- the heart of stone, glass. It sustains me and protects me, but it means I'm bad at grief. Maybe my family did not need me to be a solid shore, but I was and it kept us all afloat in our own ways.

Tarot has an abundance of water cards, fewer land cards. Unless any card not on water is to be considered on land. I think my sister is a five of cups at her worst, the moon at her best. It helps me understand her. Jesus Himself taught His disciples using parables. In other words, using symbols and archetypes He knew his sheep would understand. How different then is Jungian symbolism or tarot from Jesus' own method of storytelling? Even the miracles of Jesus are archetypes. Jesus walks on water, giving it the stability of land. Jesus fills the cups with wine. Jesus raises the dead. Jesus speaks of the ten talents, easily seen as a ten of pentacles. Jesus uses coins, cups, wands, and swords to tell His stories. In Matthew, Peter asks Jesus to explain a parable, and Jesus answers, "are ye also yet without understanding?" He proceeds to make His point again with different symbols and imagery. Jung says "all religions employ symbolic language or images" because we need them to comprehend what we can not understand. Jesus used symbols to tell stories I use them to tell mine.

The opposite of four of coins is a tidal wave washing everything I cling to away. It is grief overwhelming, grief as a lifestyle, until it is as regular as the tide. Rike wrote in a letter, "When anxious, uneasy and bad thoughts come, I go to the sea, and the sea drowns them out with its great wide sounds." I believe that is where my sister goes, for the sea is dangerous and cleansing, overwhelming and renewing. Yet even she can not be a wave all the time. If my heart can easily become stone, perhaps her heart becomes ice. Once her favorite motif was by another German, Kafka. "Ein Buch muss die Axt sein für das gefrorene Meer in uns." Or -- a book should be an axe for the frozen sea within us. Does she have a frozen sea in her? And how can she share it with me anymore than I can share with her my crystalized lump of grief?

*

Jesus told us how to surrender to Him. The Bible teaches us a lot, but it isn't very helpful when telling us how to deal with each other. "Love!" Jesus says. "Patience, kindness, goodness!" But God, people are complex. And loving you isn't the same as loving the next person, is it? Some obsess over personality tests to understand humanity. Myers-Brigg and Enneagram. I cling to my symbols, parables, fairy tales. Jung says we need them, as humanity, to understand the "innutmerable things beyond the range of human understanding" thus constantly using "symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define or fully comprehend." As Bruno Bettelheim explains in *The Uses of Enchantment*, "The child intuitively comprehends that although these [symbols] are unreal, they are not untrue." The woman in the four of coins card is not real, but she is not untrue. For me she is the truest thing there is.

I may love my native lands, but I have still traveled beyond them. I've stood on the shores of Colombia looking at the Caribbean Sea, and then the shores Scotland, looking at the North Sea. Of course, I was looking for myself. I took a rock from the North Sea and gave it to my sister because the sea is my sister's. But I'm remiss if I don't admit the Transcendentalists were correct. Who I am cannot be found abroad, in foreign seas and lands. Emerson again: "And let him go [travel] where he will, he can only find so much beauty or worth as he carries." I looked for myself on sea and shore. I found myself back home. I have a *heimat* and it's as secure in my soul as my little rocks of grief are. It's a part of me to be balanced and handled, not to be rejected.

I think I have always been land, coins, and my sister always the sea, cups. If he hadn't died maybe I'd be a nine of coins instead of a four. The nine of coins is a woman in a garden. She has discipline. She is calm. She is my goal in life, her serene face and generous wealth of not just money but time, sympathy, comfort, love. I may think, "would I be her if Daniel hadn't died?" Except: Daniel has not been the only grief in my life. He was the first. He will not be the last. I was always going to be a four of coins. Nine is a sign of maturity, I'm not there yet. Slowly, I might move up the deck.

These days as life whirlwinds around me, when I think of my *heimat* I think about the Marine Park marshlands in Brooklyn. It's a grimy piece of park at the end of the world. Land, sea, and shore. I'm land there and my sister is sea and my heart is flesh. Where water laps shore is our overlap, and both our sorrow is seen there. On the inlet with the still murky water, there I will never drown.

Motherland

Amanda
Savino



I.

We gathered around the living room
the night my grandmother died.
Amidst the tears and shock
and throughout the days that followed,
my mom and aunts processed their emotions
aloud. Words are strange; the sounds of them vanish but
they, once spoken, cannot be plucked from the air,
shoved back into mouths.

The sins of the mother
(and of the mother
and of the mother)

are not written in a book
but in the body,
etched onto the cortex of the brain.
Traumas shadow daughters,
saying nothing.

The story of my body wished the undoing of my
mother's grief, the unmaking of those
words before a funeral.

The book of my body carries the weight
of so many women. I don't know how far it goes.

II.

Write your mother as a forest floor.

If a tree falls in a forest and no one's around to lift it up
does it keep falling?

Despite its constant shade, the ground floor of the rainforest is the site for important interactions and complex relationships.

There are many layers here,
but not enough moss.
I am bruised where I've tried to lay my head.
I cannot find words for this.

The canopy dampens wind and rain, so much so that a visitor to the rainforest may not immediately know it is raining.

If a girl gets lost in a forest, does she try to run
or does she make a fire, sit in the oldness and try instead
to speak?

The forest floor is also an important fuel source in forest fires.

It seems that one must scream
quite loudly in a forest to be heard.

Vigorous ground growth is only possible where plenty of light is available.

Only once was I ever told I looked like my mother:
we were in the woods, in the clearing where our fire was,
and for a moment I wished she'd married him instead. (What does
another man look like among my mother's trees?)

The forest floor is one of the principal sites of decomposition, a process paramount for the continuance of the forest as a whole.

Are all mothers like this, to some extent?
Do we continue
while she decomposes?

III.

motherland (n.) — a country regarded as a place of origin (as of a trauma)

Sitting upright on a wood floor
I followed my mothers
back to a cliff and an ocean.
Which is to say, I followed the mothers'
pain. Which is to say, I followed my
body.

I litter the floor of my apartment with seashells
and sand. With driftwood. A lighthouse
for my grandmother.

The ocean of my body remembers all we
forget: so many women, so much grief.

- PROMISES -

ELIZABETH - SILVERSTEIN

I wanted to be pretty that day. I had this image in my head of looking striking in my grief, like the woman wearing the black netting over her face attached to that impossibly tiny cap on the right side of her head, her strong jaw accented by the red lipstick carefully applied.

Looking back on the one photo we have of the day we held my sister's funeral, I can see I was not elegantly grieving. My hair didn't cooperate as it poofed out around my neck and flattened at my skull, my curls lost to frizz. I was wearing the glasses I've had for the past ten years since my prescription hasn't changed much and I'd rather spend the little money I do have on contacts instead of a new pair. I've always been convinced of that 1990s trope, that wearing glasses makes a girl ugly, and I haven't been able to shake it, even as I age well into my 30s. I wasn't able to get contacts in time, and I was stuck with my glasses and an irrational anger about it. I'd never figured out how to wear makeup, so I wasn't wearing any. I was slouching, and my face, riddled with stress-induced pimples, held a weird smile--a smile born out of grief, half there, forced, because one smiles for pictures.

That dark day, my mother held the photo of our sister, Margaret, and the rest of us surrounded her in front of the church -- half of us unsmiling, half of us smiling (that's what you do for pictures). Three boys, four girls (now), two nephews, one niece, three mothers, one grandmother.

Margaret was gone.

I'd always believed. Out of the eight of us, I was the only one left who still held onto faith in god as we all survived our childhood. We had angry parents, regular beatings, often faced starvation, few clothes, one bathroom for ten people. There were eight of us kids then, and after my mother finally divorced my father and he became an atheist in the aftermath, I was the only one who held onto faith.

Yet I had never experienced a moment of transformation, a before and after. I'd always believed, wrestling with it when I was 12, saying the sinner's prayer at school, going back into class and looking around, wondering if anyone else at the private, Baptist school I attended saw a difference in me after I murmured some words.

When I was 15, struggling with depression and despair, I considered suicide, wanting to not be in pain anymore. I held the responsibility for my youngest siblings, Margaret included, I was exhausted from constantly trying to survive the wrath of not only my parents, but my siblings (my brother once held a chair up in the air and threatened to hit me with it. I stood there and told him to go ahead.), and no one believed me when I tried to talk about what happened in our house.

My father has the gift of a silver tongue with blackout rages--in one moment, choking one of his children, and then in the next minute, talking to police officers about how teenagers are so out of control these days. You know how they lie. They did know, they assured him.

It was exhausting.

I was so tired.

Everyone was in danger all the time, and I didn't know how to keep them safe. I'd given up on trying to keep myself safe. I'd accepted by then that no one loved me, and I didn't matter.

But even as I thought about how I would end it -- a razor to the wrists in a warm bath, probably -- the thought that intruded was my youngest sister, who was then three years old, being the one to find me. There was no clear heavenly intrusion, no gentle voice, no warm presence. I simply decided that I would accept that there was a purpose in my life, and

I would see that through and accept that God did exist, or that I would reject faith entirely, reject faith, and die. If not immediately, if not through my own hands, then a spiritual death leading to hell.

That's in the Bible. Romans 6:23. "The wages of sin is death."

I wrestled again at 23 when I found myself leaving an oppressive church in New York City. Church -- was it a church? This group of people showed up again when Margaret died, decided to broadcast intimate details of her death on a Facebook live video. I was in their community for about two years, and there was no love there, just control. Just mayhem. Corrections on what you said, what you wore, who you spent your time with. When they removed the video and messaged my older sister an apology, it was condescending and canned language, with an odd choice of words emphasized through capitalization, as though she were a child. "I thought it was a nice apology," she said.

And then once more at 27, when I thought I did everything right, I thought I married a Christian man, and what I thought was his love for me turned immediately into his hatred of me, and he started hurting me. I escaped early on from that marriage. We were barely married for a year and a half, which included a few months of separation. Most women don't escape, don't survive. Most women stay for 10, 15, 20, 30 years, because so many churches push that divorce is evil, a sin, forgive the sinner, even at the expense of a woman's life. "He was always so nice," they say of the man who choked his wife to death, who burned their house down with her in it, who shot her and their three kids.

They said that of my father, too. Except he knew just when to stop, how not to leave physical marks or scars.

I was 31 when Margaret died. I remember that morning, a Thursday. I had work to do, but I was not feeling very motivated. It had taken such a long time to grieve and recover from my marriage. In a church filled with happy, young couples and their hoards of children, I felt tainted, isolated, alone. I thought I'd done what I was supposed to do. If they were hashtag blessed, what was I?

I'd just started pulling my life together. I had writing clients, I was working on a farm, learning how to train dogs. It was hard, physical work, but it got me away from a computer and my own dark thoughts. I also was assisting with classes, taking on more management responsibilities. I had time to pursue my writing. I had just taught my first dog training class by myself. It was all starting to come together. I was taking my time that morning, and then I got a message from my youngest sister. Her language was dramatic, but it was always dramatic. I would get back to her, I decided, standing in the bathroom, looking at myself in the mirror.

Then I got a phone call. Then another one.

"Margaret's gone," my sister said, her words struggling through tears.

"Where did she go?" I asked. I was prepared to go to battle, to fight whomever I needed to get her back.

When I finally did understand and hung up the phone, my knees gave out, and I fell, catching myself on the bathroom sink.

She was gone.

The day of the funeral, I tried my best to look pretty. I'd spent more than I should have on an outfit, including shoes, charging my credit card. I hadn't driven the three hours to my mother's house prepared for a funeral. It was a dark day, and we all did our best to feel at least a little bit in control. If we couldn't change the fact that our sister was dead, we could at least choose if we wanted to wear a dress or pants. I wanted to be driven there, even though the church was only a few minutes down the road, and I climbed into the car with my sister's friend, next to the giant photo of my beautiful sister, gone too soon.

Then I noticed my mother wandering around, her keys in her hand, and I crawled back out and took the keys from her. We arrived at the church, just down the road from her house, just a little further from where it had happened, my mother leaned over to me and asked, "Do you smell alcohol?"

"No," I said.

“Good,” she said. “Because I just took a shot.”

I felt like I was supposed to comfort other people, and I didn't want to make it okay for them. I also didn't want anyone to comfort me. It all felt alien, unreal. I didn't have any words to say, but other people, complete strangers, definitely did.

I listened to them offering their empty words, saying she was in a better place. But if my faith was right, and the bible to be believed, I knew she wasn't, and that's what broke me that day.

My faith slipped away as I sat in the memorial service, deadened emotionally, unable to process, hearing christians claim that she was in a better place, she was with god now. It vanished, following the empty words of others, punctured by my grief.

I knew what they said wasn't true, because I knew what the bible said. It says “seek and ye shall find.” That's Matthew 7:7-8. “Knock, and the door will be opened.”

For years, Margaret sought. We had many, many conversations about faith. She asked carefully thoughtful questions. A few years ago, she told me, “I tried to believe like you and mom. I just can't.”

There was hope, I had decided then. If she can't believe right now, then it's just not time yet. God will reveal himself to her when it's time. Jeremiah 24:7. “I'll give them a heart to know me.” Ezekiel 11:19. “I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh.” Ezekiel 36:25-27. “I will give you a new heart.” John 6:44. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them.”

I loved her so much. I waited for that time -- I spent hours with her, listened to her stories, listened to her pain, her grief. I answered her questions when she asked me, waiting for god to show up and reveal himself to her when it was time.

And that was the biggest thing I struggled with, when I believed. What exactly were the promises of god? Peace? I had anxiety for as long as I could remember. I waited, I prayed, I pursued, I believed, and that anxiety never went away. In fact, especially after my divorce and a move to New Jersey, it got worse.

What were the promises of god?

I knew I wasn't worth anything, that I didn't deserve anything. I could recover from a bad marriage, and realize that maybe there was a plan there all along. Maybe I still had a purpose. I almost lost my faith after my divorce, but I didn't. I understood losing a child, or a spouse, a believing sibling. There was a lesson, perhaps, there. A testimony to others. Maybe it's profound grief, but god called them away, to heaven, and those families will be reunited. Justice after death made sense, too. I'd always felt like justice wasn't possible on earth, here, now. The system was so broken. But everything would be made right.

I could explain everything away, hold on to those slippery promises, until she died.

Grieving manifests as a strange thing. I knew that it would take a year, a window that still holds months to complete. Maybe my faith will come back. Perhaps.

All I know right now is that god never answered her knock, and she was gone.

Just like that, my faith was gone, too.

My Arrested Development

by Magdalynn Hyde



When I was 19 years old, I got married. I had never kissed the man who I said my vows to. I had never so much as gone out on one date with anyone else. Yet there I was, promising to love and cherish the very first man who expressed interest in me. Cue the record scratch and freeze frame. Hi, my name is Maggie, and you're probably wondering how I got myself into this situation. Or maybe you're not wondering at all. Because chances are if you were raised at all similarly to how I was, this bizarre circumstance is a normal occurrence.

Being a child raised in a Christian family in the 90's and early 2000's, there were certain molds that I fit into. I say molds because most of my friends shared the majority of these traits with me.

Homeschooled? Check.

More than 2 siblings? I have 8.

Weird skirt-wearing phase? Please don't ask. (If you know, you know.)

One of the largest parts of my childhood, and the one thing that affected my life the most into my adult years, was the notion of courtship. I'll save you the trouble of looking it up if somehow you've never heard of it. Here is the excerpt of the definition given on the website of the Institute of Basic Life Principles. (The problems with IBLP are for a whole other essay. Again, please don't ask.)

"Courtship is a relationship between a man and a woman in which they seek to determine if it is God's will for them to marry each other. Under the protection, guidance, and blessing of parents or mentors, the couple concentrates on developing a deep friendship that could lead to marriage, as they discern their readiness for marriage and God's timing for their marriage.

Courtship is a choice to avoid temptation and experience the blessings of purity. It is a choice to not emotionally give away your heart, piece by piece, to many others through casual dating relationships and instead to give your whole heart to your life partner.

It is a choice to wait for God's best, for His glory. It is a decision to walk by faith, to trust in God, to honor others above yourself, and to believe that God will deal bountifully with you, because He is love.

While a surface reading of this definition raises a few alarm bells, it isn't even completely forthright about what courtship truly is. When a young man and woman wish to court, the man must approach the woman's father and ask for his permission. After that, all their "dates" are under supervision.

The worst part, and the part that was the most detrimental to me, is that is an implicit fact that courtship is pre-marriage. Breaking up a courtship is basically the same as breaking off an engagement. The pressure upon a courting couple is enormous, and it is not an environment where the two of them can truly get to know one another.

I hadn't even turned 15 when I met the man who I would later marry. I developed a crush on him, and as I was close to his sister, I told her about my feelings. She in turn told their parents.

Now before I go on, let me just say that my case is my own. I know everyone had different experiences, and what I went through might be vastly different from another person's courtship. I am simply stating what happened to me.

His mother went completely bonkers when she found out I liked her son. Suddenly he and I were Meant To Be. She was planning our wedding even before our courtship began.

I have two very vivid memories from this time of my life.

The first was from before I was even sure of his feelings for me. His mom brought me into her house and showed me something she had bought for me. They were hand towels with a "P" embroidered on them. (their last name began with P.) I was mortified. How did a simple crush turn into this? Those towels quite literally scared me to death and they honestly still haunt my dreams.

Secondly, I remember a few months into the whole mess I mentioned to his sister how I found another guy attractive. Which is a completely normal and innocent thing for a girl of 15 to do. But she told her mom. The mom got fumingly angry at me for this. She refused to speak to me. I even sent her an email apologizing, but I received no response for days. It wasn't until my mom spoke to her and rationalized her down to earth that she finally agreed to talk to me. Remember, all of this was because I found another guy attractive BEFORE I had even begun courting her son.

When the courtship finally did begin, the enormous weight put on the both of us was enough to crush a boulder. We weren't allowed to so much as hold hands. This is an extreme case, but it is what we experienced. We were planning our wedding before we were engaged. I began to get more and more terrified. The P towels fear compounded.

The crux of the matter was I was getting married and I felt absolutely numb. I figured that the "crush" I had when I was 15 was the butterfly stage, and after that passed everyone just pretended. I was going through the motions. Surely this was how it was supposed to be. We were courting. We were getting married.

I have come to believe that the whole Christian courtship mentality is rooted in (perhaps) well-intentioned romanticism. Maybe this is my way of trying to make it sound logical, but hear me out.

The notion of meeting the one, the ONLY one. Falling in love. Getting married. A perfect romance, unmarred by messy stories about exes and failed dating experiences. The seal of true love's kiss would be saved for your wedding day as the ultimate symbol of how you saved yourselves for one another. Everything after that would be smooth sailing. The two of you had had so much time to click mentally and emotionally. Adding the physical aspect would be a natural and smooth transition.

The only thing wrong with this plan is absolutely fucking everything.

The engagement and marriage all occurred within a year of the courtship beginning. I remember the days leading up to the wedding as one would recall a fevered dream. Vivid blurred images. The night of our rehearsal dinner, the minister who was to marry us took me aside. He had clear blue eyes. The kind that pierces your soul and read your thoughts.

He told me,

"Maggie, you know you don't have to do this."

To this day I don't really know what prompted him to say this. He had been counseling us, talking to us for months. Never once did he mention that maybe we shouldn't get married. He seemed all for it to be honest, using us as a shining example of how godly courtship led to a beautiful marriage.

Up until that night.

"Maggie, you know you don't have to do this."

I didn't answer him. Didn't even look at his face. I was too busy thinking of all the people that would be at the wedding. All the money spent. All the heart and soul that families involved had poured into it. How many people we'd disappoint when they found out that courtship could fail.

Even despite all this, you may be wondering why I still went through with it. Well, imagine being told that your first boyfriend (girlfriend) was the person you were going to marry. Take into account the fact that I was 15 when I first met him. The people surrounding you, raising you, tell you this is the right and godly decision. Imagine being 19 approaching the altar, and knowing if you turned back that you would be dissolving friendships and even family ties. Maybe you would call into question some peoples' beliefs.

The pressure on my shoulders, and I'm sure on his too, was too much for anyone to bear, let alone a scared and impressionable 19 year old about to marry her first boyfriend.

So I did it. I got married. But there was a whole other part of the relationship I had barely scratched the surface of, and was wildly unprepared to meet. The physical part.

The transition was rather insane. We went from being told it was a sin to so much as hold hands before marriage, to being asked when we were having babies. It's kind of hilarious looking back.

How do you go from, "You shall not touch" to "Your body was made to please your husband and you must give it to him as often as he wants."

My views on sex were pretty much as unhealthy as it comes. To my understanding, which sprung from what I was told, sex was primarily for male pleasure. If the woman enjoyed it at all, it was secondary.

My entire 5 years of marriage were complete drudgery in the bedroom. I loathed sex. I would watch TV and movies where women took pleasure in it, and would think to myself that it was all such a lie. I figured it was just a mass-produced Hollywood fantasy.

The point of writing and sharing all this is not to blame anyone or to cast shadow on anyone's character. Those who know me best know all the reasons that prompted me to end things, but the short answer is that my marriage failed because we were both young and completely unprepared for the real world.

As the years progressed I began to realize that my husband was not a man with whom I wanted to spend the rest of my life with.

Divorce is a terrible, terrible thing. The bible condemns it for good reason. Many broken homes are a sobering testament to this fact. Divorce is often wrong, maybe it was wrong in my case. I will have to make my own peace with God in that matter.

I have learned three things from this experience. These next points may or may not be controversial.

1. Courtship does not work. I know that there are probably couples that are products of it and happily married, but I believe this is due to them rising above their circumstances.
2. Young marriage is risky and should not be so widely encouraged by the church.
3. Dating can be beneficial.

I wish I had dated. I wish I had learned about compatibility. I wish I had seen my ex-husband's true colors before agreeing to marry him. What I'm saying may be redundant. Maybe this mindset is a thing of the past. I hope and pray it is. I know my family has learned from my experience. My desire is that the next generation of Christians will never have to experience it at all.

I'm sure there are others out there with similar stories. Some probably turned out way, way worse than I did. Maybe there was no happy resolution.

But I'm so eternally grateful I have this opportunity to start over in life. I first heard the term "Arrested Development" from a very clever TV show. But I think it is a term that perfectly describes my life up until now. My life was in arrested development for 5 years. But now I am finally doing all the things I should have been doing in my late teens and early twenties. I am finally pursuing my education in earnest. Being a journalist has been a dream of mine ever since I began writing in elementary school, and at 25 I am finally on my way to achieving this.

I am dating. And although I sometimes feel afraid that my indoctrinated brain is forcing me into serial monogamy, I think that maybe that is just me. I don't want to date different men all the time, and that's ok. As long as I'm doing it for me.

If you read through all of my hubristic ramblings, I am surprised and honored. I truly hope that something I said will impact someone, somewhere. I have never really connected with anyone who shared a similar story with me, although I know they're out there. I would love to hear from you if you have. My DM's, as the kids say, are open.

HOMESCHOOLED: A SERIES OF MOMENTS

Brittany Ann Zayas



1996

Bronx, NY

I'm six years old. I'm at a barbecue, probably a birthday party, at my Uncle Danny's house. Salsa music pumps from the boombox, the air is smoky from the grill, which my uncles hover around. The concrete is littered with bits of candy from the pinata we bashed earlier. My sister is swimming in the pool with my cousins, but I don't know how to swim.

I can't find my mom. Relatives and relatives of relatives and people who can't believe how big I've gotten are everywhere, but not my mom. I see Titi Carmen sitting at a table and I come up next to her.

"Where's my mom?"

"I don't know...." She looks at me and smiles, which is rare. "Come sit next to me and wait for her. I'm sure she'll be out of the house soon."

I climb onto the bench next to her, even though I want to check the house now.

Titi Carmen is talking to another woman, a stranger to me. "They're all homeschooled," she says, gesturing at me. "Lisa homeschools all three of them."

"They don't go to school??" the woman repeats, glancing at me. "How do they get any *socialization*?"

"I don't know," Titi Carmen says, like she's excited to share. "That's what I said. How can they *socialize*?"

I slide off the bench. They don't notice me leave, anymore than they noticed me after I sat down. I turn the word over in my mind: *socialization*. It's a big word. I couldn't explain what it means exactly, but I understand--homeschooling is not normal.

*

1995/1996

Ridgewood, NY

I want to learn how to read. My sister Melissa is four-and-a-half years older, and she has been reading since she was four. Mommy and Daddy pulled her out of the Lutheran school because she was bored--everyone in first grade was learning how to read, and she wasn't learning anything.

At home, she does her work from eight to three, and I sit on the floor making my way through phonics workbooks. I get distracted by coloring the pictures that go with the short-vowel words.

The pictures in all my readers are uncolored too. We have an old collection of McGuffey's readers, and I read those with Mommy--sounding out MAN and CAT. But these aren't books I want; these aren't stories.

I make up stories in my head, about Robin Hood and Arabian Nights, I listen to the stories my sister tells me and that Mommy and Daddy read to me, and my own thoughts at night are just stories, weird details that I don't know how to write down.

My first story that I read is from a little reader, with black-and-white drawings with bits colored blue. It's dull stories about Jan and Tim, but when I read it through for the first time, I'm so proud of myself. I want to read it to Melissa, but she's at a friend's house.

*

1997

Ridgewood, NY

The doctor makes me nervous. Not just because he's a stranger, and he's too friendly and too comfortable with grabbing my arm or touching me. But I hate the questions.

The only thing grown-ups know to ask kids about is school. So every time, the doctor and the nurse will want to know, "How is school?"

I can just say, "Good." And leave it at that.

But they always have more questions--especially if I came for my check-up during school hours. "What school do you go to?"

"I'm homeschooled."

And then the reactions can go anywhere.

"What? Like you do school...at home?"

"My husband's cousin homeschools her kids...."

"Do you like it?"

"Do you have friends?"

I just pull into myself and let Mommy answer the questions. But I know they all keep looking at me. What is an unsocialized kid like?

*

1997/1998

Ridgewood, NY

The public school in Ridgewood, Queens looks like it'd be hard to get out of--kind of like a prison. The windows are barred, the whole thing is one big square cement block dropped on the sidewalk. But they have free lunch for kids in the neighborhood, and free food is no joke.

Mommy takes us for the free lunch sometimes, usually once or twice a month. Going to McDonald's, getting pizza, having dinner at Sizzler's, that's all special. We can't always do that. But for free food, you can do a lot.

By the time we walk there, I'm complaining because my side hurts. But I like the free lunch, on its little tray. The food isn't good. It's small sandwiches or pizzas most of the time, but it feels like pretend food. I can't imagine who makes it.

I dump out the watermelon, because it tastes like nothing, and the milk, because milk is gross, even though I love the tiny toy-like carton it comes in.

After lunch, we can go to the library, and the library has high ceilings and makes you feel free. Inside, I can pick out whatever books I want. I take out an Anne of Green Gables book. I read the Great Illustrated Classic version, so I want to read one of these that doesn't have pictures.

"You can't read that," Melissa says. "You're too little."

I'm ready to cry, but Mommy lets me take it out. When I finally get to read it, I don't understand what's going on, but I pretend I do.

*

1998

Ridgewood, NY

Learning spelling is not like reading. Spelling lessons mean reading the word and copying it down. Then you spell it and sound it out in your head. Then you cover the first two versions, and write a third time. It's torture.

I sit at the kitchen table, crying. I can't do this. It's twenty words, and that's too many. Mommy tries to encourage me, then scold me, then tells me that I'll have to finish it today, even if it means doing it after dinner.

It's after 7 pm when I sit down again. This time I just copy the words exactly. No one notices.

*

2002

Bloomfield, NJ

I spend weeks studying for the spelling bee. I am good at spelling, even if I mix up the order of I and E in words like 'receive' or 'niece'. I have the list of words and I pore over it, for once having some kind of motivation.

At the spelling bee, the kids fill a room in a church basement. It's all of middle school, so it's maybe sixty or seventy kids. The elementary kids are somewhere else. They go through each middle school grade, and eighth-grade is last. I join the line, right in the back because of my last name.

We go in rounds. The first words are from the list. I know them. But the list words quickly run out. And I, at the back of the line, am stuck with more words that weren't on the list. People get eliminated. The line gets smaller.

"Facsimile," says the judge.

I blink. "Uhhhh..." I repeat the word. I have never heard it before in my life. "F-A-um...X-I-M-I-L-I. Faximili." I know it's wrong. I borrowed the spelling from an alien name in a book I read.

“No. I’m sorry,” says the judge.

I hurry to my seat. I don’t remember anything else of that day, except milling around a gymnasium, holding a participant ribbon.

What I do remember is how to spell facsimile, which I looked up as soon as I got home. F-A-C-S-I-M-I-L-E.

And no one uses faxes anymore.

*

2002/2003

Bloomfield, NJ

I’m not a good student. My attention is not ever in my control, able to be bent to what I need to do. It drifts away and everywhere. I sometimes wish I could do my school in my room, but I can’t pretend I wouldn’t just lay down on my bed and read a book if given the chance.

“You haven’t started the practice,” she says, looking down at my algebra book.

My graph paper is covered in drawings and a few song lyrics. My discman is on top of the open pages of the textbook, along with a couple of CDs. It’s pretty obvious that I wasn’t doing anything productive.

She gives me a look, and she picks up Steven’s composition. “Is this done?”

He’s only eleven, and he’s the worst liar. His eyes slide as he shifts his skinny body into more of a pretzel shape. “It said it had to be two hundred and fifty words,” he says. “I counted. Two hundred and fifty-one.”

She starts to read aloud. ““A farmer and his wife went out on a very very very very very very very very very very windy day...””

“It’s two hundred and fifty-one words.”

“Rewrite this.” She puts it back in his hands. “That’s cheating.”

He complains, and I just put on my headphones, letting Jimmy Eat World drown him out. The numbers and variables on the page of my book look like another language. I start the practice, lining up the numbers, and skipping back to check on how to do it. I spent most of the morning correcting all the wrong answers Mom marked from yesterday’s lesson. I watch her as she looks at them, marks the new answers correct with a red pen. I nod at her, pretend I can hear her.

I raise the volume on the discman. I write down some lyrics in my book, under a drawing of a cat. Steven’s going to get this book after me. I wrote down the answers into my last math book and he was excited about that before Mom caught on and erased them.

Steven is looking at me, so I take off my headphones. Arianna is whimpering to Mom, holding up her finger. “But can I lay down?”

“She says her finger hurts, so she can’t do her schoolwork,” Steven explains to me, erasing his paper so hard he makes a hole in it.

“Okay, go lay down on the sofa for a little bit,” Mom agrees.

I didn’t hear Arianna’s whole plea, but it must’ve been good. For a six-year-old, she is a pretty good liar. She hurries to the sofa to lay down. Steven and I look at each other. “My finger hurts too,” I say.

“My nose hurts,” he says.

“Stop it.” Mom gets up and goes into the pantry. The door swings shut behind her.

I put my headphones on and continue drawing on the page, around the practice problems.

*

2003

Clifton, NJ

We were supposed to leave at ten-thirty, but it’s almost eleven, and we still need to stop by Pathmark before we get to the Fontanas’ house. “I’m going to be so late,” I say again.

Mom lowers the music, and for once I’m not annoyed. I don’t even want to hear the music I put on--all I can do is look at the clock. “I was late last time too,” I remind her.

“Well, we have to get you lunch. Or you can just starve.”

“I didn’t say--”

“Of course there’s traffic!” She mutters to herself in Spanish.

I clutch my camo backpack to my chest. If I’m late for American Girls club, I’ll ring the bell and they will all be there and know I’m late, and I’ll have to walk up the stairs and into the apartment when they’ve already started. And I have to read my poem today.

We pull into the Pathmark parking lot and I stumble out after Mom. I wish I had a watch to keep an eye on the time.

She makes her way to the sandwich section. “An Italian sandwich?”

“What does it have?” I try to read the label, but she’s already moving. “Does it have cheese?”

“You can take the cheese out.”

“But it gets melty and weird!”

She rolls her eyes and gets to the line at the register.

“It’s so gross, picking out the bits of cheese.”

“Then throw it in the garbage! Don’t eat anything!” She pulls a Snapple from the small fridge by the register and slams it down next to the sandwich. She smiles at the cashier like nothing happened.

I take the bag and follow her out into the parking lot. I bet everyone’s at the Fontanas already.

A car stops suddenly next to me, honking, and Mom pulls me to our car. “What the hell were you doing?”

“Thinking!”

“Get in the car!”

Neither of us says anything till we drive up to the Fontanas’ house. “Bye,” I mumble, getting out.

“I’ll see you later.”

I walk up the steps and ring the doorbell. I almost wish we hadn’t come at all. I shove the stupid Pathmark bag in my backpack. I don’t want people to know why I’m late.

Rebecca answers the door. “I thought you weren’t coming,” she says. “We need to talk about the play.”

“Oh yeah.” I’d forgotten about the play. I hope Meghan isn’t still mad at me for being assigned the lead. If anything, she should be mad at Rebecca--who did the casting.

We go upstairs. I kick off my shoes by the door, hating their no-shoes policy. Rebecca herself is always happily barefoot. No one is in the apartment, which means they’re all in the attic.

Everyone is there--Sarah, of course, because she and Rebecca live here, but also Meghan, Roxy, Victoria, Grace, Hannah, Gwen, Leah, and Rachel. Mrs. Fontana is scribbling something on the calendar, and she turns to smile at me.

“Hi Brittany!”

I smile grimly, and sit in the empty seat between Meghan and Rebecca. Everyone has their books out. I pull mine out--it’s been a while since I read this book, but I figure I can make it work. American Girl Club books are easy reads--just the actual American Girl books and the Dear America books, which I’ve been reading for years. I’m not great with keeping up with the homework from the workbook though. I feel like I always do it last minute. I definitely haven’t even looked at the play.

Meghan leans in. “Rebecca is being so bossy about this stupid play--who put her in charge?”

Rebecca doesn’t seem to hear her, she’s redoing her long black braid.

“Okay, so first--you should all have started working on your New Jersey posters already,” Mrs. Fontana is saying.

I haven’t started. It’s art and should be easy, but it’s honestly kind of boring.

We’re turning in our workbook sheets. I’m a bit excited to earn the badge, even if it means trying to iron it on my sweatshirt in the next week. The last time I tried to iron on the badges, I got a little too excited about the steaming spray and I left a big brown burn on the sweater. I have to cover that up with badges.

All this stuff about America is kind of weird. Any moment we’re going to all be reading our America poems, and I’m nervous, like someone is going to think mine is super fake. I keep thinking about the picture of people at a Fourth of July parade in my third grade history book, looking happy and waving the flag, being patriotic. I still don’t understand that feeling. I read a lot of America poems this week though so I think I get what people are writing about.

We talk about the book for a bit, about the pioneers in the Dear America book and the Larsen family in the Kirsten series. Roxy brought her Kirsten doll today and seems kind of distracted by it. I am too. I’m obviously too old for American Girl dolls, but I still wish I had one. Rebecca has two and Meghan has two, and they don’t play with them anymore, but they used to and they have them on display now.

It's time to read our poems. Roxy is so scared she's whispering the words--but she is only eight, the youngest of us. Sarah is nine, so she's a little better. Victoria is super loud when she reads it, and she's annoying, of course. I exchange looks with Rebecca and Meghan.

"I'm so glad she's in the *other* play," Meghan whispers. "Imagine if we had to rehearse with her???"

Gwen awkwardly goes through hers, but everything Gwen does is awkward. She's younger too, like eleven, but she always seems nervous. I think we all will never forget the time she showed up wearing all this makeup that she said she was allowed to wear. She looked like a mess and then we all got to see when her mom came to pick her up and yelled at her because she'd stolen her sister's makeup and sneaked it on in the bathroom at the Fontanas'.

I feel bad for Hannah's hushed reading, which I can barely hear. I like Hannah, even if I often can't really hear her.

It's my turn then. I pick up my poem and go up to the front of the room. I wish I'd thought to drink water or my Snapple. My throat is dry and closed. I try to swallow. And breathe.

And I read it. It's so hot in the room, and it's like everything disappears into this red haze. I can't see Mrs. Fontana or the other girls or anything as I read. I feel good. I can hear my own voice and it sounds confident.

When I finish they're clapping. I hurry to my seat. "That was so good," Meghan says. "Mine is terrible."
"Yeah, really good," Rebecca says.

"Thanks...." I shove it back in my bag. The room is still too hot. But I did it.

*

2004

Hawthorne, NJ

Teen society is pretty much identical in a school, on a deserted island, or a New Jersey Home Schooling Association (NJHSA) choir. The popular people are not always the most attractive or even the most talented, but they have staked out their claim in their society, and anyone who wants in has to bend the knee enough to be accepted, though I do think being really hot would be an automatic in.

Matt is one of the most popular boys, and he has bleached hair, an earring, and wears baggy pants made out of terrycloth, so of course Melissa likes him, despite herself. He plays guitar, and there's just something about musician boys that is irresistible. He's a senior, like her, and though she's known by name to the popular kids--she is in their graduating class--they pass her by like she's a ghost.

I'm less than a ghost. I can feel it sometimes at choir, like I'm more than invisible. I'm non-existent. The few friends I had at choir were the rebellious girls who wore too much black eye makeup and liked the same kind of pop-punk music I did, but they didn't last long there. They might even have just gone back to regular school. And my other friends aren't in the high school choir. Rebecca doesn't sing, and Meghan is younger and in the junior high school choir.

I was friends with another girl named Brittany, but she wants to be popular, so she does what she can to get in. She hovers and she laughs at their jokes. I don't talk to her anymore.

I learn my part in the songs, memorize the Italian or the Latin words, but I dread every other Thursday, walking into that Hawthorne church and fading into nothing but a body in a chair.

*

2005

Clifton, NJ

Co-op makes me happy. It's every other week, a day where homeschoolers in my area can go and take classes together. Parents volunteer their various expertise in exchange for lower costs of placing their children. I can excel at art, imitating Japanese brushwork with bamboo pens under a former teacher. I learn how to cook from a chef and a baker who volunteer their time. I take biology, watch some horrific sex ed videos and dissect a frog.

There I'm one of less than ten high schoolers, and I am seen. Lauren is older and fouler than me, but I like her. My friend Rebecca is there. The boys actually talk to me--Will with his freckles, Jake with his quiet placidity, Q with his wordly-weariness, and Tim with his annoying jokes. I belong.

I don't know who I am, but I find myself raising my hand, asking questions. Usually everything I know feels jumbled in my head, and I'm never sure when to use any of it. But here my knowledge can be parceled out and appreciated. I hunger for praise, which is rarely given when you're one of four.

I also have my chance to misbehave one trimester where we have a Greek teacher. He drones on about Greek and random life experiences he's had while we pass notes, while we eventually start playing catch with crumpled up paper. Oblivious or incredibly determined to ignore, he continues, till someone falls off a chair, and we all get in trouble.

But even as we are lectured by one of the other teachers, there is something glamorous about the moment. I am outside of my own head. I am in my chair, surrounded by others. I matter.

*

2006

Brooklyn, NY

I have the independence I wanted, but I am not motivated enough to do my work. I'm sixteen, recently moved back to Brooklyn, and my nights are filled with drives out with my sister's friends and a college boy who likes me. School is just another chore to get through each morning.

Now with Mom helping out at my brother's school, I am left to my own devices. She takes Arianna with her while she helps the eighth-graders. Steven is in his freshman class with a pair of rambunctious twins, Josh and Joel. Melissa is off at college. I am sent to do my work over at a family friend's apartment right by the school.

But I'm not alone. The twins' older sister, Shannon, is my age. She seems more delicate and feminine than me, her movements poised and elegant. She loves things in open ways that I don't understand--she loves Christmas and Valentine's Day. In contrast, I dread holidays and refuse to put ornaments up; I wear black on Valentine's Day to match my dyed hair, recently chopped short and daily straightened.

We slip into routine, into understanding. We share friends, but are close with different people. Every day we go to Miss Marla's empty apartment, the living quarters of a single woman nearing middle age.

Shannon does online classes, which my parents can't afford. She puts on her headphones and takes her classes. I make my way through my textbooks, but still my mind drifts. I watch YouTube videos. Eventually Shannon too gives up on productivity and takes a nap.

Outside there's a balcony and we peer over at the neighbors, talking about things. We leave all our textbooks and assigned readings, and go to the library, where I try to introduce her to the kinds of weird dark fantasy I like--vampires and death.

We both hold back secrets. We both are concerned with how we seem to other people.

*

2007

Brooklyn, NY

Shannon calls me as I'm on my way to meet her at the school where we are taking our SATs. "Do you have time to buy radishes?" she asks.

I look at my mom driving. She is not going to stop for anything, much less radishes. "Uhhh. No. Why?"

"Emma told me they help you remember things! I was going to buy some but I completely forgot!"

She sounds genuinely stressed so I don't point out the irony of forgetting something that helps you remember things. "Sorry. I'll see you soon."

At the school, she is nervously waiting at the steps, even though this is her second time taking the SATs. This is my first time taking them, and I've studied for about a week, and I haven't ever taken a test like this, but I feel nothing. The halls are filled with students, but today we're all the same, blindly following commands to give over our cell phones and go to the room we were assigned.

I wish Shannon good luck and go up to the classroom. I stay focused on the test, even though I want to be thinking about anything else. I fumble through an essay on a Gloria Steinem quote and it makes some kind of sense, I think. I wrangle some answers out of math problems somehow. The verbal section is easy and I finish before the time is up.

I doodle monsters on my scrap paper, not daring to look at anyone and have them think I'm cheating. I let my mind go wherever it wants to. When the time is almost up, I move the booklet and realize with horror that I missed a whole page and a half of the section.

They call the time and I give up my booklet.

*

2009

Brooklyn, NY

I walk into my first college classroom with more relief than nerves. I've been done with high school for a year, with a GED down, and I've been working various jobs, while people in my life have told me I shouldn't go to college.

"You should take care of your mother," Pastor Steve said to me. "Why are you going to college? Work and help your family."

We both know my dad won't help her.

But she doesn't want my help like that. She took me to Brooklyn College and marched me into the financial aid office for loan papers. She somehow got the tax information from my dad, who wouldn't give it to me and hasn't spoken to me in months. And I signed those papers that neither of us fully understood, promising to pay the government back what they are lending me.

I'm grateful, but mostly just tired. It's not yet 9:30 am, and I had to wake up early to straighten my hair. I don't know what to expect. I read the required freshman reading over the past month, but I didn't read the last chapter and that worries me. I should've read it.

A Latina girl comes to the front of the class and greets us all cheerily. "I'm Nico, your peer mentor!" She says she'll support us in college life and be in touch every week. She can even help us study. She shows us her classics textbook, which is stuffed with post-its like she started taking notes already.

After a while, Nico realizes it's 9:30. "Where's your professor at?"

"Here." A good-looking young guy slides out of one of the front-row desks, and Nico backs up. The freshman girls lean forward in their desks.

After Nico leaves, Professor Dodson hands out his syllabus, which I take and carefully begin to mark up. He puts us through one of those awkward icebreaker games that I didn't realize people did in college. And then he tells us he wants us to write an in-class essay on *Dreams of My Father*, the required reading.

My heart stops. The boy next to me groans quietly, mumbling to anyone near that he didn't even start the book. As we all take out paper and begin to write, I don't know what I'm doing. Around me, everyone is looking up confusedly, flipping through the book, trying to find some quotes.

No one there knows that I'm homeschooled. That this is my first time in a classroom. That this is the first time I've had to write an essay in a class, to be handed in to a teacher, a stranger.

The girl across from me is wearing a fedora, which she takes off as she writes. The boy in front of me scuffs his Uggs boots against the floor. In my Converse and intentionally mismatched patterned hoodie and t-shirt, with my blond-streaked hair, I'm just another college kid, starting in the same place.

We all are doing the same assignment, working together, working uncertainly, and there's comfort in that. All that matters now are the words on my page.

2019

New York, NY

Ten years later, I write about being homeschooled for my grad school class, and though I've told stories about it for those ten years, the words don't come easy.

It came up in my college career often, after I declared myself an education major, and had to answer questions about my own education in class discussions. It came up as I observed in public schools. I started to bring it up, started to be unembarrassed about the awkward questions. I presented a paper I wrote about homeschooling at a regional honors conference when I was a junior. I found that my own struggles to find my motivation and focus as a learner was something my peers were only just learning, now that they were thrust into academic independence.

And yet--I admitted to having been homeschooled in a job interview, and it almost cost me the job. It's been twenty-four years since I first started learning at home at age five, but people still don't know what it means. Does it mean I did whatever I wanted, and learned nothing? Even if it did, didn't I earn my GED, my SAT, and my college degree? Is my education worse than the many underfunded schools in America that provide miseducation to underprivileged children?

Is my education who I am? And which education defines me? My homeschooling? My 3.86 GPA from earning my bachelor's? My slow-going master's degree?

I promote education at my jobs, with the elementary and middle school students, with my college freshmen, I impress upon them the importance of learning. But we all have a different path of learning. And that path, to further complicate things, is intertwined with so much more. I think of all the things I have left out here in this short piece--of my battles with depression and self-harm, of being abused by my father, of living in fear in my high school years, of trying to get through college when my home wasn't a safe place, of begging the financial aid office in my sophomore year for a loan when my dad wouldn't submit his tax forms. Does that all define me instead? How can I tell my story and leave that out? How can I teach and forget all that exists for others?

I don't know. All I can do as I write this is show my story in small bits and pieces, and some may be strange experiences unique to homeschooling, but most is just my experiences trying to figure myself out. I think that is the same no matter where you go to school. I don't know that I'd be any different if I'd gone to school, if I'd be where I am now.

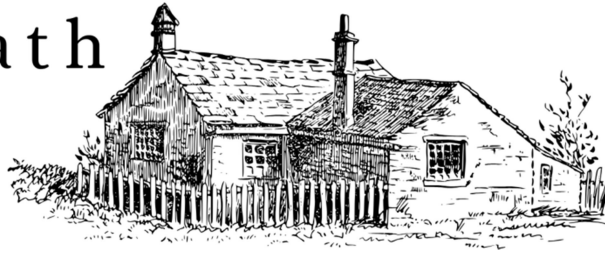
I'm not quite sure how I got here in the first place. I'm still figuring out where I'm going now.

III.

FICTION



Underneath



Elizabeth
Silverstein

Pushed up by the sun, yellows and oranges filled the sky over the mountain as Mary made her way down to the lake, carefully stepping on the rugged rocks splayed with green moss. Cool air swirled up into her nostrils and she shivered, a small curl of a smile on the left side of her mouth. She followed the largest rock where it touched the water, letting her toes submerge in the lake. She saw a small rock near her feet--triangular and black. She picked it up, leaning over carefully, and ran a thumb over it. Slick and bendy, she realized it wasn't a rock, and she flicked a nail over the edge.

"Out of the water, please."

The words hit her suddenly, and she seized up in shock, her heart jolting, and she fell backwards, stumbling over her own feet as her heels hit a slick patch of moss. A small hand grabbed at her elbow, but she still hit the rock hard, the force of her ample bottom sending a jolt up her spine and rattling her brain.

But she was not in the water.

Janet--small, thin, with such remarkable skin for her age--eased herself down next to Mary, holding a shallow, woven basket. "Are you alright?" she asked.

"I'm okay," Mary said, wondering about all the spots that would be bruises later.

"Good," Janet said, her voice switching from soft to hard immediately. "Please don't go in the water. That was my one rule when you asked to visit. It's not safe."

She stood, waiting for Mary to get up.

"The ... water?" Mary said, feeling a headache inching in, trying to understand what would not be safe about a lake tucked into the mountains. She glanced around as she pressed a hand against her temple. The forest cuddled up against the slope to the left of the cabin, a couple of hundred feet behind them. The lake stretched out quite aways in front of them, with mountains all around, except to the right, which held a path wide enough for an all-terrain vehicle to head back down the mountain where her car sat parked at the trailhead. "What's not safe?"

"It's the underground springs," Janet said. "There's a whole seam of gases that feed into the lake. It really isn't safe. I had it tested. Come. Let's get eggs for breakfast. Come."

She was up and heading back towards the cabin as Mary struggled to her feet. Janet was already dressed for the day, Mary noticed, in a linen shirt and overalls, while Mary still wore her t-shirt and checkered pajama pants from the night before. She held an arm in front of her body, and wrapped her other hand around her elbow, a habit she'd developed as a teenager and had never been able to break, even thirty years later.

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Mary felt at ease with a kitchen knife in her hand, slicing evenly through an onion freshly picked from the garden, which joined the potatoes in the iron skillet, raising up a fresh burst of crackling. She used a hand towel to dab at her eyes, while Janet made bacon and eggs on the other side of the stove. "Leann laid two this morning," Janet said, a bit of pride puffing out her words. "And I do a trade for the bacon with a farmer on the other side of town when the girls lay extra."

Mary nodded and smiled, swiping the towel across her forehead. It was a small kitchen in a tiny wooden cabin, and the heat from the stove filled it quickly. She was thankful when they finished, moving the food to plates and sitting at the small kitchen table, their plates bumping against one another. Janet had left the door open, with a screen separating them from the backyard garden, where hummingbirds flitted up to the feeder. The bees made their little buzzing noises, and the birds sang.

It was quite charming, Mary thought.

But then the noises abruptly stopped, and she looked up, startled.

“Stay here,” Janet said, and she ran outside the front door.

Mary got up from the table, and peaked out the front door. Janet stood by the lake, staring down at the rock, at what looked like a large red stain. When she turned to come back inside, Mary rushed back to the table, and heard the creatures outside resume their typical chatter.

Janet came back inside scowling, saying nothing, and Mary didn’t have the courage to ask. But when Janet failed to smile, or start a conversation, Mary felt guilt from the morning start to twist her insides. Maybe it was something she’d done.

“Thanks for having me,” she blurted. She shouldn’t have gone near the water. She’d known better.

Janet nodded. “It’s nice to have the company,” she said, splitting her egg open and letting the yolk join the potatoes. “The phone hasn’t rung in so long that I almost had a heart attack when you called.”

Mary smiled. “I wasn’t going to, honestly,” she said. “But we can’t afford a vacation—we haven’t been able to for the past five years. I’m just tired, at this point. And when Tom mentioned your cabin, it just seemed like the perfect place to get away for a little bit.”

She paused. Janet said nothing.

The silence in the small space grew and anxious to fill it, Mary found the words tumbling out. “I’m unhappy. Just really unhappy. And Tom doesn’t care and doesn’t work to work on anything regarding us. He didn’t want to come with me here, saying maybe I needed a weekend to myself, and I do -- it’s not that I don’t, I *do*, but I just want him to talk to me, and he won’t, and I’m scared to think that after 27 years, our marriage is just *over*, and that terrifies me, because who would want me now? What would I do? Where would I go? I feel like I don’t know who I am anymore, like part of me has been erased. I used to go dancing and visit museums and eat at restaurants now and again, but he’s not interested in doing anything anymore. And we don’t have the money even if he did--”

Janet handed her a cloth napkin.

“Thank you. Is this my life now? The past five years have been so hard. And it feels like he’s given up and I’m so tired of fighting and keeping us afloat. I look at the future, and it’s just dark and bleak.”

She was hiccupping now, trying to talk between sobs.

Janet reached out and patted Mary’s hand. “There, there.” She waited a moment, but Mary was done.

“Would you like some advice?” Janet said, as Mary fought to regain control over her weeping, the napkin covering her face.

Mary managed a nod.

"I'm an 87-year-old woman who has never married," Janet said, picking each word carefully.

Mary tried not to stare, but she could not fathom that an 87-year-old woman would look that youthful. Maybe it was because she'd never married.

Janet continued, "I don't have any. I have no advice. I can't tell you to stay with my nephew or leave him. But I can tell you this. You get to choose. You can stay. You can go. Each decision will have its own difficulties. But neither choice is wrong."

Mary nodded. "Thank you," she said, fighting away a wave of disappointment. "These eggs are delicious."

Janet smiled. "Leann lays the best eggs."

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Mary helped Janet clear the table and wash the dishes before she announced she was going for a walk.

"Wonderful," Janet said. "There's a trail to the left of the house that leads into the woods and up the mountain. Stay on that. Bring some water with you."

Mary nodded and watched Janet put on a large straw hat and grab a wicker basket with gloves and a trowel. "We'll start lunch around noon," Janet said. "I'll be out back."

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Mary crept towards the lake, walking more carefully this time, and wearing her sneakers instead of being barefoot. She glanced over her shoulder at the cabin, frightened that Janet would pop out at any moment. Frustrated that she'd leave with more questions than answers.

And then, there it was -- a large blood stain on the rocks, just near the edge of the lake. She walked around it, peering into the water. She couldn't see the bottom. The rocks tapered off quickly. Was there something in there? Gases in the water didn't make much sense, but what did she know about natural springs? Could a gas kill an animal?

She peered closer, and jumped as she saw a very dark, large shadow glide through, deep in the water. She hurried to turn away, and get back to the cabin, but her shoes slipped on the rock, and she gasped as she fell. The water folded around her, cold and unwelcoming, and she started to panic.

She hit against something, large and rigid, rocks probably, she thought, but then it moved, and she gargled in a underwater scream, gulping in water. She was drowning, she realized. There was no more air, she couldn't see, and she didn't know the way up. This was it.

But then there was a flash of memory, when she was young. Her father had told her that she would always float to the top. She stopped struggling, and felt herself moving to the left, and she used the little left in her to kick.

She broke the surface, gasping and spitting and crying, scrambling towards the rocks, but struggling to get a grip until she rolled herself to the side. She moved on all fours, feeling her knees scrape against the stone, feeling her knuckles get torn open, and she heaved herself to her feet, running towards the cabin. She glanced back as she reached the door, and saw a massive, black head lifting out of the water, two stories high, water dripping off of horns and tendrils. It snorted, water spewing from its nostrils. Then it was gone, and she stumbled inside the cabin.

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Janet rushed around, grabbing towels and bandages. "Don't go in the water, I said. My one rule. Don't go in the water."

Mary's teeth chattered as she sat, dazed, on the kitchen chair, watching her blood redden a towel and start to drip on the floor.

I think I have to go to the hospital, she tried to say, but her tongue was large and swollen in her mouth. Her head spun.

"A poultice, *the* poultice," Janet muttered, grabbing a large plastic tub labeled "sour cream" from the counter. She pulled back the towels on Mary's arm and leg, and took a large handful of the dark cream from the tub, slathering it into the gaping wounds on Mary's thigh, her bicep and forearm. A few more globs, and Janet seemed to calm down, staring intently at Mary's face. "You should lay down," she said, and helped Mary easy down to the floor, placing a rolled up towel underneath her head. Mary stared up at the ceiling, her heart beating wildly in her chest, and she realized that this was how she'd die -- bleeding to death on the floor of a crazy woman's cabin in the middle of nowhere, sliced by a water dragon's fins.

She chuckled, she couldn't help it. Of course.

"What?" Janet said, her face disrupting Mary's views of the slanted wooden panels.

"I didn't say anything," Mary said, surprising herself with the sound of her own voice.

"No, you did," Janet said. "Something about bleeding to death. You're not bleeding to death. How do you feel?"

Mary took an inventory of her body, stretching out her toes, and lifting her elbows. "I'm -- ok, I think."

"I'll have you sit up in a moment," Janet said, standing up with blood-soaked towels.

Mary glanced down, gingerly lifting a knee so she could see her thigh. No more blood--no gashes. She pulled on her pajama pants, looking through the hole to see her leg. Her blood was there, still, smeared across her leg, but all that remained of the gash was a white scar.

Janet reappeared, helping her sit up, telling her to breathe, just breathe.

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Janet made iced tea and served it outside in the garden.

"The birds and the animals don't like him much," she said. "Now and again, a deer will get too close and he'll have himself a snack, but they get quiet whenever he emerges. That's how I knew he'd gotten something, this morning at breakfast. And that's how I knew something had happened to you."

"I slipped," Mary said. "I didn't mean to go into the lake." She couldn't look at Janet, or sip her tea, or do much else besides clutch the glass and feel the pain of the cold on her fingers.

"It matters very little now," Janet responded. She plucked a flower, twisting the pedals in her hands. "I hoped, that by coming here, you'd find your voice," she continued. "And I think you've started to. Now it's time to temper it. Make it loud sometimes. Soften it sometimes. Figure out each situation and respond accordingly. You're looking for answers, and regardless of whether you intended to go into the lake, you still got close. You tested the wrong thing. You were willing to take the risk for the wrong thing."

"I know," Mary felt like a child. "It was a distraction, I guess. I don't know. I just wanted to know what you were hiding. I just want to have some certainty for once."

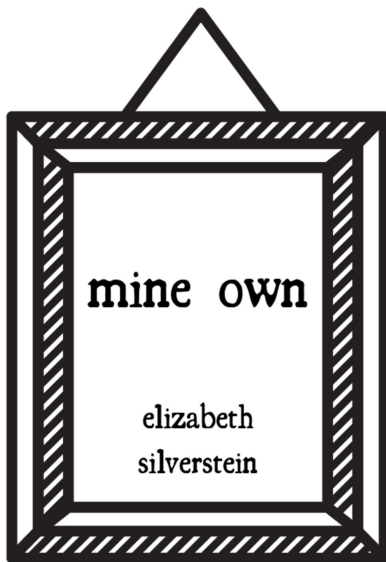
Janet glanced at her. "When I was 20 years old, I found an egg. The past 67 years have been trying to hide my dragon from the world. He's special. His scales can be ground up into a powder and made into a cream."

"They have healing properties," Mary said.

"Yes," Janet eased back in her chair. "But he doesn't shed often. And the scales can be taken by force, but it would hurt him. So I dilute it, and sell it as a face cream. I give more to the ill. Just enough to keep them comfortable. I tell them it's herbs I find in the forest. I use a little on my skin. I don't make trouble with anyone. Because I don't know what to do with a dragon. I want to live quietly and alone, choosing my moments to use my voice."

"And you don't want 40-something women showing up at your door," Mary said, trying to make a joke.

"I do not. No." Janet smiled. "But I invited you, Mary. I wanted you to come. I wanted you to find your voice, and whether you stay with your husband or you go, you are welcome here. As long as you stay out of the damn lake."



She found herself in that perfect moment of rest, transitioning back into consciousness, while the pillow and the blanket provided a deep cloud of comfort, and the last bits of a dream faded away. She felt his hand on her back and she stiffened, remembering that she was angry.

She rolled away from him, refusing to open her eyes, and mumbled "Go away." as she flipped on her side just for a moment so she could tuck the blanket underneath her, get comfortable again. She could finish that dream. But her heart thudded loudly, and the feeling of peace slipped away, and all she could see was red behind her eyelids. The red quickly gave way to seeing herself from his eyes, her hair, long and dark, spread out over the pink of the pillow, the rest of her hidden underneath the covers.

His eyes glanced away, a sigh settling in his chest, taking in the art on the walls, his own work, one portrait of her hanging above the dresser, her hair cascading down her shoulders much like how it fell across the pillow.

As quickly as the moment came, it slipped away, fading into the darkness of her own closed eyes.

He pulled his hand away, shifting on the bed, but didn't leave.

"Can we talk?" Reuben's voice was calm, low. His voice had been one of the things she'd fallen in love with a year ago, the steadiness that she had thought reflected his character.

She resented that he was calm. That he got to be calm. The anger built up again. This time she saw through the eyes of their neighbor from the apartment next door, as he jogged down the stairs and threw a bag of trash into the dumpster behind the building. She heard the clang of the lid as it slapped back down, and the smell of rotting vegetables clogging up his nose.

She recoiled, sitting up. But the anger kept coming in waves, and she flitted into other minds -- someone waiting for the bus at the corner, then another buying milk at the convenience store down the street, then a driver, sitting at a red light and scrolling through messages on his phone.

"Are you okay?" Reuben said, his voice pulling her back, his concern cutting through her rage.

She focused on breathing, calming herself. "I can't see straight right now," she said.

"I understand," he responded.

"No, you don't," she said, throwing her arms over her chest, trying to manage the disappointment, the sadness, and the anger without falling away again into someone else's eyes.

She hadn't been this angry in a long time. "You really don't," she continued.

Any other words felt empty. He knew. Work had become rote for her -- a daily pattern of all the same things, in the same order. She'd fallen in love with him instantly that day, finding him in the park on her lunch break, watching him sketch the portrait that he would later turn into the painting that hung on the wall. Everything had been a rush for her - the feelings, the emotions, but he'd come along more slowly, more hesitantly, unsure. He was the perfect distraction from her own problems, the troubling ability she'd had since she was very small, the mindnumbing work she completed every day. She discovered passion and joy with him, threw herself into his work, found a coffee shop that wanted to hang the art he'd created. It was his first show, a real show, if not a gallery one, and she'd invited everyone to see his art but also to meet him. But he immersed himself in other things when she stepped into his world, and he started helping other people, finding the perfect excuse for his own avoidant behavior.

"I understand," he said, reasonably. "It meant a lot to me that you did that for me, and I'm sorry that I hurt you."

"That's it?" she stared at him. "All of my family, my friends come to a show that I put together for you. You don't even make an appearance. No text. No call. And you don't even have an excuse? I get the family dinner, I guess. Why you couldn't come for Christmas, even. That was for me. I suppose I was silly to expect my boyfriend to want to meet my family. But this was your show, Reuben. This was for you."

He said nothing.

This time she saw through the eyes of a child, small hands reaching out to catch the concrete.

"I needed you to be there last night," she said. "I needed to be able to trust you last night. And then I get home, and there's this mess, of your shit everywhere, and it's just part of the constant reminder that I clean up your messes, and I cover for you. Did you just forget? Did you forget about the show I've been planning for the past three months? I know you forget sometimes. I get that you have this creative process that's so important, and my plans get in the way." She could feel the anger giving way to tears, and she pulled the blanket up, over her chest, trying to form a protective shield.

"I didn't forget," he said.

She hated his dumb calmness and his stupid face. For the first time, she wanted to hurt him. She wanted to see him suffer and feel the way that she felt. She'd worked so hard to compromise with him. She'd picked out this comforter with its reds and blacks as a favor to him when they'd moved in together three months ago. She'd wanted lavender, but he wasn't a fan of purple. He liked the deeper colors in his art and his home, he'd said.

They'd settled on light accents instead. She'd been proud of how they'd worked through that. She'd wanted to make him happy.

"Last time, you'd said, that when you made a promise to do something I asked you to do, that you would make sure that you did it, no matter what," she said. "Are you telling me now that I can't trust what you say anymore?"

"I'm realizing," he said, "that I am too quick to promise. And I thought I just needed to be more careful of what I said I would do, but sometimes, things happen that I can't control. I can't tell you the details, but someone needed me last night more than the people at your show. And I'm sorry. But sometimes that happens and I can't control it."

"My show," she murmured. She twisted the edge of the blanket up between her fingers. "Who was it?"

She thought she knew. She suspected.

"I can't tell you. It's a pretty personal thing for this person, and it's a story I can't share." He started backing up off of the bed.

"Just tell me who it was. I don't need to know the story. I just want to know who it was."

He was halfway out of the bedroom door, heading towards the kitchen. "Do you want some coffee? I'll make some coffee."

She darted up, following him. "Just tell me," she said.

He said nothing, reaching for the coffee in the cabinet.

She felt the rage building up again, furious at him, furious that he kept picking someone else, being there for whoever needed him. Then she was in his mind again, looking at the coffee in his hand, and instead of just a moment, she lingered, feeling her own consciousness hit his, and she pushed.

She saw it all right there - the phone call he picked up, the jumbled texts, him changing direction at the last minute to find Laura, the one nice shirt he owned getting bloody when he found her, her shoes missing, bloody and bruised in a run-down house, taking her to the hospital.

The screams tore her back out -- guttural and piercing. She slipped back into her own head and found Rueben writhing around on the floor. She threw herself to the ground, trying to hold him, comfort him, and he seized up, going silent.

She was cold, and she wished she'd brought a jacket. She shifted around in the hard chair, sneaking glances at him on the hospital bed as he avoided eye contact, his arms wrapped around himself.

He flinched every time she moved.

"You're the first person who has allowed me to really feel everything," she said, finally giving in to the weight, the pressure, the understanding that she'd ruined everything between them. She couldn't look at him -- she stared down at the ground, her mouth dry. "You let me get angry, and you try to make it right. I know that. Most of the time. I know you care about people. I know you're always going to be there for Laura, before me. And that hurts me a lot. Even more than you not keeping your promises to me. And because you let me feel, and I feel a lot, after

repressing it for so long, it's activated something again I've fought against since I was a kid. Any emotion, when I was younger, was punished. Pretty severely. Especially anger. And anger -- and this going to sound bizarre, and I don't know how else to say it -- activates this ability ... thing ... I can do. I can see what other people see, just for a moment. This morning was the first time I'd pushed any deeper. I've never done that before. I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have."

"I think you took something from me," he whispered.

"No, no," she said, popping up out of the chair, unable to help herself. "I didn't!"

He grabbed a pen from beside the bed, the napkin that had been provided with lunch, and tried to draw. The lines came out stunted and rough, the shapes loose and uncontrolled.

"You like to say you can't draw," he said, finally looking up at her, his eyes hard. "You try."

He held out the pen.

Her hands shook as she placed the napkin on the countertop, sweating as she tried to grip it, and the lines flowed quickly as she sketched, drawing him, so small in the hospital bed. There was nuance in the lines, then there was controlled technique in the shapes, and goodness, the shading tumbled out. Then the details of his beard emerged easily, and she captured the character in his eyes.

She looked up at him, confused, tried to approach him again. "We can fix this," she said.

He shook his head. "That--" he nodded towards the crumpled napkin in her hand. "That cost me 30 years. Over \$100,000. Hundreds of pencils and erasers. Thousands of pieces of paper. And you just took it, because you were embarrassed. Because you were upset I'd made a choice to go save someone's life instead of coming to your party."

She flushed, the room spinning.

"I loved you," he said. "I know I'm not perfect, but I try as much as I can to be a man of my word. To own up to my mistakes. To try to make it right. Laura is self-destructing, and she needed me, and I don't pick her over you. But I did choose life for her."

Her mouth was dry. She shoved the napkin into her pocket, and left slouched, trying to fill the emptiness with the space of her own body.

She sobbed on the way home, riding the train, her tears blinding her to the stares of strangers. When she stepped in the door, it wasn't home anymore, and she packed a bag, taking only a few things, including the painting, the first time she'd seen herself through his eyes without leaving her own.

Edilma: an exercise in fairytales

spring, 2014



Sarah Nichl

He's European. He smells like colognes and never smiles, like a Russian on a propaganda poster. Today he's wearing a tight black shirt with BERLIN written on the back. I don't know what Eurotrash really means, but he definitely doesn't look trashy, just Euro. He's sitting in the front row of the computer lab. He's young but he looks exhausted -- probably works full-time already and is in college just because he needs that degree. He's really good looking in a grumpy way. I can't imagine him smiling, enjoying anything really. He has never spoken but I imagine his voice thick and hard. He's an immigrant.

She's Cuban and I talked to her the first day of class. She had been sitting in the back but moved forward to the seat next to his -- claimed it as her own for the rest of the semester. She has resting sad face and I can't imagine her smiling either. She always wears pretty dresses and shoes. She's gorgeous and I can't stop looking at her. Her skin is milky-dark and she has freckles. Her eyes are almost green. She has a sharp nose and a soft mouth with high cheekbones. When she speaks it's soft and tinted with a light Spanish accent.

They sit next to each other in Accounting 301, tucked away behind the computers we all hide behind. Next to each other in the front row, he spreads his stuff out, spreads his body out, opens a thousand tabs on the computer, and doesn't actually do the work. Yet he usually has the right answers. I guess he just knows. She sits primly next to him with great posture. Sometimes they lean in and talk a little about the lesson. I sit behind them and observe them because the class is so damn boring, and because they look so wrong next to each other. They don't come in together or leave together. I never assumed they spoke outside of class.

We all come back after the two week spring break and I sit two rows behind them, as I always have. And then -- I see her reach out absentmindedly and touch his neck -- that muscle that runs from right behind your ear into your shoulder. She plays with his hair for a moment, pulls her hand back, a simple move. I watch a little closer and he puts his hand on her leg, for a second. They lean in and whisper like they always have.

I guess they're dating. Maybe it started with studying together- she needed his help. Then it was lunch together once. Exchange phone numbers. Hang out over break. And suddenly, sometime between March and Easter, they're dating. Suddenly, they know one another, intimately. They still aren't smiling, but I'm behind them so maybe I'm missing that. He checks his phone, she types hurriedly. I can't see her computer. They move with elegance and nonchalance. They give each other conspiratory glances and whispers. I see him crack a tiny little half smile at something she says. I guess I believe in love if these two strange, sad people found each other in the most boring class in the world.

I imagine them lying side by side on a bed, on top of the sheets, still, with a fan blowing gently.

When he leaves class in a rush one day, she catches his eye and says, "Wait for me?" She asks me on the way out what I'm expecting on the midterm. We exchange a few complaints about the class and he comes back. I guess he waited for her. He's standing, a few feet away, waiting for us to finish. I say bye and they walk off together at a slow pace.

Later I see them together. I see her leaning against a wall and laugh lightly and he's saying something and leaning over her. Her hand is on his arm, gentle touch. I end up retracing my steps some fifteen minutes later, headed to the bathroom. And they're still standing there. Two feet between them. He runs his hand through her straight, shoulder length bob. They're like royalty stuck in college students bodies. You don't put on that sort of grace, you're born with it.

One Monday in late April she's in a crop top and blue skirt. He's leaning over her on the wall where they stand and talk after class. He puts his hand on her bare waist. I've never seen them kiss. They are inconspicuous in their comfortable movements. Never showing off; it's not PDA in the traditional sense. Their romance is pristine.

Her name is Jenny, I think. It was written on her Starbucks cup. But once when our professor called the roster, I thought she answered to "Edilma." They're both laughing today, in their corner, goofing off. He has his hand on the back of her chair. I think they're texting each other in class, probably about our professor who yells when we're not getting answers quickly, as if that helps. Their chairs are almost facing each other. On their way out of the classroom, he keeps his arm around her shoulder. She's laughing loudly and they stop in front of the wall they always stand in front of. She holds him, his head bent into her chest. Then he holds her, her head craning into his neck.

I find his name on the roster of the business class we took together last year. Then I find him on Facebook. He's from Bosnia Herzegovina. Like, damn. His English isn't the greatest and he's prone to writing poetically. I can't find her on Facebook, but I can find over 60 people with her name which, according to a roster I found, is Edilma. I can't decide if I want to use Facebook as a way of checking up on them after the semester is over. He's graduating, hasta la vista, middle finger to higher education. Maybe I'd rather imagine sunsets and happy endings for them. I don't want to see him with someone else eighteen months from now.

"Edilma." He captions pictures of her on Instagram. Edilma.

May 7th. He's in class, surly in his corner. She comes in almost forty minutes late, walks straight past him, no eye contact. He looks down and doesn't move as she brushes past. I think, "It's over." She sits way behind me and they're not looking at each other and I'm having a weird morning as it is. Midway through class a guy I've been chasing after texts me out of the blue. I'm probably going to fail this class 'cause I'm spending it texting boys. The whole room is silent and stressed. When we're done I am getting my stuff together and I don't want to see what happens and I'm trying to get out. Everyone in the room noticed when she sat in the back. Her regular seat looks empty and awkward.

But he grabs his bag and doesn't leave; he walks past me to the back of the classroom, to her. I hear him say, "I'm sorry." Hand to God, this happened. They leave together, a few steps behind me. I head to the bathroom and see him with his arm around her shoulder. She's crying and they're walking downstairs but she's not pushing him away. I don't look for them when I get out of the bathroom because I don't want to know.

May 11th. Together. Still together. He's sick, a head cold lacing his voice. She's sitting next to him. The final is next week and their heads are down, trying to rush through the work. She's cut her hair since last week. They still look melancholy, but I know their body language well enough by now to know that's just them, just how they are. I see him smile at her with his eyes, mouth barely agreeing. Their bodies move in tandem, necks craning to see the projector our professor is pointing to.

I can smell his cologne. They're sharing an iced coffee, passing it back and forth, even though he keeps coughing guttural chest coughs. It's suddenly hot this week. She's in a soft denim romper and he's wearing dark green shorts, when eleven days ago she was wearing a down coat in class. Her flip-flops are kicked off under the desk. Her bare heels are tapping rhythmically against the metal clawed legs of the swivel chair. She grabs his arm with enthusiasm when he says something funny.

After class they lean on their wall, he has his hand in her hair. She's wearing it curly today, in her natural Cuban waves. She usually wears it straight, turned in at the bottom to frame her face. I can hear her laughing.

Next week. She comes in half an hour late and, unlike a few weeks ago, smiles and sits by him. He jokingly holds her chair in with his foot, they wrestle to get the chair out. She play-smacks his arm and sits on the edge of her chair, bag behind her. They are quiet, heads bent together. Their whispers are serious. He runs his hand down her arm, gently, repeatedly. She's in an electric pink bandeau and a black tank. He's in shorts again and still coughing sometimes, that lingering congestion from the end of a cold.

They smile so much more now. They're so much happier. Every time they look at each other- his smile crooked, his eyes doing most of the work. He snaps at her bandeau, exposed, and she laughs quietly, shaking her head in embarrassment. Class ends, she and I exchange looks of great sympathy. She asks for my numbers -- we're going to try and study together. "Thursday, maybe?" she asks. "Like, in the evening?" In the hall he joins us, and we're talking through plans to meet.

I leave them to be alone. I need to head uptown. But before I go I look back. I see them on their wall; she's leaning against it, knocking her sneakered feet together, he's leaning over her. They look like West Side Story. Edilma Delangel and Haris Mut. Those are their names.

Twist of fate. We never text each other and I find myself tipsy on Thursday night. I'm out with a coworker who I've been eying for a while, and I'm kissing him on a train platform. And I wonder, if she'd texted me, would I be here? One good turn deserves another.

Monday is our final. She comes in, laughing because she lost my number and apologizing because we didn't meet up. We chat because he isn't here yet. She tells me she wants to move to Boston -- her family is making her major in business, but she wants to peruse music. Her dad, he's overbearing, you know? She's tired of New York -- the exhaustion, the expense, the family breathing down her neck. Born here, immigrated here, raised here -- if you grew up in New York, no matter how much you love it, you have to hate it a little too. She's from Astoria, and she's been priced way out now, gentrification ruining her *fucking life*. Haris comes in a little late and by then there is no talking. We take the exam in silence. He leaves first and I wonder, is this the last of it? Time passes. She leaves, then I do, five minutes behind her.

On my way out, I see them both on their wall. He waited for her. I have a choice, now. Leave it as is -- just walk away. Or, approach. I approach. "How'd you do?" And, "how was it?" Suddenly we're talking about any number of topics. Local coffee shops, astronomy, my trip to Switzerland. She asks, so I show her how I put my hair up, my deft fingers redoing the style quickly for her to replicate. We talk for what feels like eternity. Her hand is on his arm. I want to ask, to understand the nature of their relationship.

But I have to go uptown. And I don't want to steal all their time together. "Are you going to wait for me, or go home?" she asks him. She has another final starting soon. "You should go home," she adds before he answers, "You're tired." As I leave I say, "Bye, good luck." They say they'll text, say we'll get coffee. There's a moment where we could be friends. We could meet up, get to know each other. I could text her. I have her number in my phone. But I don't.

That's the last I saw them. The last truth I have.

But what if I do? I text her. Or maybe, she texts me. Maybe we go get coffee, I'm there through their summer relationship and, in September, she leaves for Boston. And that's the end then, with just her number in my phone to tell me otherwise.

Maybe they break up before she leaves and it's fond memories but no future. And maybe I have to watch them break-up, listen to her cry over it. Maybe.

Or maybe we never text each other. But that doesn't mean it's the end. It's not over because it's not over. Why can't it end well? A story cut short doesn't mean it's a sad story. I can't prove they didn't live happily ever after.

"Edilma." He still writes her name. She still grips his arm, her nails painted sky blue, and they still walk down staircases together slowly, steps synchronized. This is the magic of a story. I just made them immortal. I just made them a myth, a fairytale.

L.V. ESSAY



FIG. 182. *HEDERA HELIX ALGERIENSIS VARIEGATA.*

ON COOKING

Sarah Diehl:

I still haven't figured out how to feed myself. I know how to cook. My mom made sure I knew *how* to cook rice and beans, meatballs, pecan pie, oatmeal cookies. But just because I can cook doesn't mean I have the time or energy. The fact that I am solely responsible for what I put in my body as an adult still hasn't quite sunk in. There are days I get home and remember I need to eat and... I, as they say, "just can't even." But I must either invent a meal from the fridge or pay up and order delivery which is often a disappointment. I don't want a take-out burrito, I want real food.

Cooking and homemaking in general is made so overly complicated. Whether you're under Pinterest pressure to produce charming snacks for your children's playdates or under Instagram pressure to produce delicious plant-based meals to fuel your gym habit, both these ideals ignore the fact that whatever your family situation or job situation is, you're probably hella busy. And maybe a tiny bit lazy.

But the truth is we need to eat, right? And we all have those days when it just feels like we can't muster up the strength to boil a pot of pasta or throw some veggies in the Air Fryer. Maybe I have these days them more often than others. Most of my conversations with my roommate Theresa are about grocery shopping or meal prep and yet our actual cooking-output is not impressive. When it comes time to make that fancy meal we planned for, often we just... can't even.

Hopefully this feature will be helpful to stir up some ideas for quick meals, easy recipes, or give you a new old standby.

To start off, here is my own old standby:

Starchy Salad:

One can of black beans, rinsed. One can of corn, rinsed. Or frozen corn, thawed. A few spoonfuls of salsa from a jar. 1 chopped bell pepper, optional. Mix and eat.

For more spice add a packet of Adobo and some olive oil. For more health add half an avocado or eat it over greens. For less health eat it with tortilla chips. Either way, beans and corn are filling. It looks like a side but trust me, it can be dinner.

Meagan Josselyn:

I work a 9-6pm job on a good day and most of the time the last thing I want to do when I get home is prepare a meal. But I am of course always hungry, and that healthy salad and kitkat at lunch doesn't do much come 7:30 pm.

A third of the time I end up eating snack foods for dinner. Second option I end up not eating at all, or finally I make the time to cook.

To actually cook and not just think about cooking, you need to hone down on the basics that you always have on hand. This took time, as I used to feel like I “needed” to have certain things in my cabinet or fridge and if I didn't, I somehow wouldn't be prepared or able to make a full meal. That said, I have learned what does work: Banza Pasta, cheddar cheese, fresh garlic, limes. These don't apply to everyone, but having these core things on hand I found that 1) it saves me money on stuff that will go bad and 2) if I have the same core, I can interchange the ingredients and I know that I will generally enjoy them.

Just because something is prepackaged doesn't mean you can't execute it creatively. I always have my go-tos. Frozen ravioli. Finish the pasta with a quick “carbonara”: add an egg, some pasta water and parmesan cheese post-cooking for a twist on a basic. Pizza dough. Personally love the Trader Joe's crust dough, which can be turned into far more than just crust. I've made dinner rolls, burger buns, focaccia bread, garlic knots, etc.! It also freezes really well and so you can stash away without the pressure of using it right away.

I know my time and energy is precious and so when I cook, make it last longer than just that meal. I hate meal prepping, the thought of eating the same one-pot-meal portioned out into 5 pack lunches just doesn't appeal to me. So when I do cook, I focus on meals that has a base that can be adapted in several ways. One of my go-to's is taco bowls. I make lime and cilantro rice, ground turkey with seasoning, pico de gallo, and sometimes street corn. I store all these components separately, and in turn layer them with each other in different forms: tacos for dinner, rice bowl for lunch, salad with just the pico and turkey the next day.

Another favorite is ginger soy chicken. Deceptively simple, it tastes great with rice or veggies: Slice chicken breasts into strips and throw into a ziplock bag. Add ½ - 1 C. of soy sauce, 2 Tablespoons fresh grated ginger, and 3 diced garlic cloves. Let it marinate. This can be made in the morning and kept in the fridge until ready to cook. Or let it sit while you make rice. Once you're ready, add the entire contents into a frying pan (you can use a splash of oil but only if necessary). Cook chicken until done. Sometimes I will add more soy sauce if needed, just want it to cook in the liquid and have a little to flavor the rice. This takes little to no time at all, saves and reheats well, and as a health option, serve with garlic broccoli (quick steam until barely cooked, broccoli florets just until the color starts to pop. Thin slice garlic and start to crisp it in a large frying pan with a little bit of oil. Transfer the broccoli to pan and cook until desired finish. I tend to like mine on the firmer side).

I have learned these few pointers by the trials and errors of “adulting”. But the most important takeaway is to not beat yourself up if you don't cook yourself a full meal every night. Focusing on basic nutrition and making time for yourself (which cooking allows) is what matters most. So turn on that podcast, pour yourself a glass of wine, and turn that Wednesday evening into something it might not have been.

Hannah Diehl:

These sweet potato pancakes are from a recipe I found online, but then heavily modified the ingredients and method for my allergies. I never care enough to make certain I have the exact amount of sweet potato the recipe calls for, so I always adjust the proportions of dry and wet as I go until it feels right. I just try to go for a batter that reminds me of regular potato pancakes, then cook as such. These take some time to prepare and cook, but they

always leave me with at least three days worth of lunches. They're good hot with syrup and cold with applesauce. A few pancakes and a container of applesauce is an easy meal to pack and then eat quick.

2-4 sweet potatoes (the amount you have affects the proportions of the rest of it)

1 ½ cups any type of flour

3 ½ teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

½ ground nutmeg

1 ½ teaspoon cinnamon

2 eggs worth of egg substitute (or just eggs)

1 ½ cups any kind of milk

¼ cup melted vegetable spread (or butter)

1. Microwave the sweet potatoes like you're making a baked potatoes, let steam for at least 5 minutes
2. Remove skins and any tough material and mash smooth on a large flat surface, like a large plate
3. In a medium bowl, sift and mix dry ingredients
4. Mix the egg substitute and melted spread in with the sweet potatoes on the plate (it's too thick to stir in a bowl)
5. Add the sweet potato mixture and the milk to the flour mixture to form batter.
 - a. The sweet potatoes are starchy and thick, so I recommend starting with less flour than you feel you should have and add as needed
 - b. I add the milk as I go, fully incorporating after every addition, but again it's by eye to tell when you're good
6. Heat a pan over medium heat, greasing with canola oil once it's fully heated, then let the oil heat up as well.
 - . More oil at a higher temperature fries them more like latkes, but a lower temperature gives soft a softer, more classic pancakes vibe
7. Cook however you cook regular pancakes, the only thing to remember is since the batter is more doughy make sure to spread it out in the pan before letting it cook, otherwise it'll get kinda lumpy and won't cook evenly

Cooking these are kinda fun, cause even though they do take time it feels sort of like meal prepping, since you can make them over the weekend and know you're set on lunches for the first half of the week.

Rachel Alvarado:

I've always hated tomatoes. Specifically raw tomatoes, in all varieties. Salads have always been challenging to order since I inevitably pick around the tomatoes and every salad in the world contains large chunks of them. Seriously, has no one heard of topping a salad with maybe some red peppers? A sliced mushroom? Anything other than tomatoes and cucumbers (another hated veggie, but I digress).

However, over the past few years, I have discovered a way of preparing them that does not repulse me. The secret: vinegar. While I have always hated tomatoes, I've also adored pickles since childhood, so much so that my parents nicknamed me "Cindy Pickles" (why Cindy, I don't know). While there is nothing revolutionary about splashing

some vinegar over diced tomatoes and quickly pickling them before serving, for me it was a culinary revolution. Pico de gallo and bruschetta became the two exceptions to my tomato boycott and I suddenly realize I could just make these at home. Earth shattering, I know.

Nowadays, this concoction is *always* in my fridge. I'll dress a salad with it, throw it over grilled chicken, toss it in an omelette, or use it atop avocado toast.

The Recipe:

- Tomatoes, diced (on the vine or plum are my preferred breeds)
- Red onion, diced fine (I like a 3-1 ratio of tomato to onion, but you can add more or less to your taste).
- Your favorite herb, chopped (both cilantro and basil work great).
- Vinegar, a generous splash to coat (usually I use white wine vinegar, but balsamic or red wine work as well).
- Salt, to taste
- Pepper, also to taste.

Combine everything in a bowl and let sit for anywhere from a few minutes to a few weeks. Serve over anything that need some brightness and acidity. Then stick it in the back of the fridge and pull out the next time tomato inspiration strikes.

I love to cook, and the more I learn, I firmly believe anyone can come to enjoy something they dislike given the right ingredients and presentation. I did it! I have conquered tomatoes! Up next, the aforementioned cucumber and then perhaps zucchini.

Katie Diehl Cortese:

Here are the tenets, the axes, and the guiding principles of my approach to cooking. I believe that the preparation of potato leek soup is a force against the powers of darkness and late capitalism. We live in the Devil's territory but leeks are allied with the Divine. The only reason to buy bananas is to let them get so black your husband starts to complain, throws them out, and you have to buy new bananas so you can make that banana bread you like. He also says I never make a meal the same way twice but I have instated myself as our marriage's cook so I never have to do any other housework. It is my trump card.

Having married a Jersey boy, I can affirm that Taylor Ham is God's perfect breakfast meat. If you have never tried Scottish porridge, you do not realize how garbage American oatmeal is and how inferior even Irish oats can be against the sweet, finely ground, winsome powers of the Scots and their porridge. If you don't like oatmeal because it is bitter and tasteless, you have working tastebuds, congratulations, and you need to order the good stuff immediately.

Here are three recipes I make a lot. Warning: they have a lot of fat in them. High fat high protein meals help me manage anxiety which I discovered after a lot of experimentation with vegan meals in my first year of grad school. However, your mileage may vary.

Katie Famous Soup

I made this soup all the time for my roommates in grad school. It makes good Day One leftovers but gets mushy by Day Two. It is full of allium plants and heals colds.

Crumble spicy italian sausage and saute in a soup pot until it is cooked but not tough.

Take it out and put it in a bowl but leave some fat behind.

Chop up 1-2 onions and many many cloves of garlic. Saute in the fat/maybe butter or oil till they are translucent.

Add white wine and chicken broth (up to you how much) and a can or two of cannellini beans, let it boil then add chopped up head of escarole and let it simmer. Add back in the sausage last so it doesn't get tough.

Italian Flag Dinner

Dip chicken tenders in egg and then in panko, fry up on each side till they are golden, then bake for about 10 minutes at 375ish. When I say fry, I do not mean deep fry. A teeny bit of oil will suffice. You do not want greasy chicken.

Fry some baby tomatoes in a pan with a teeny bit of oil until they get "blistered" and/or start popping. High heat is best so use non-olive-oils.

Serve with arugula, balsamic dressing, and some mozzarella balls.

Fancy Fish

Cut up about 2 tbs of butter and dot it on a baking tray. Lay a pound of cod, haddock, or flounder (flounder is best) over the butter. Sprinkle panko and then add thinly sliced lemon.

Bake at 375-405ish for 10-15 minutes.

Serve with some kind of roasted potato, and string beans/peas/spinach with lemon.

If you are opposed to animal fats in your food you should make Pioneer Woman's vegetarian chili. Pasta with broccoli and garlic is also good. Potato leek soup is better without bacon: I know, I'm surprised too. Eat a lot of Scottish porridge and you will go far in life.

Other ideas from our Instagram Followers:

"The secret to anything is MSG. Buy a bag of Korean ramen. Take the sauce (MSG) and mix it in whatever you're making. Or, just eat Korean ramen. It takes 2 minutes and it's heaven. If you want, add an egg and/or cheese."

"Chicken breast, salsa, cheddar cheese: put in crock pot on high for about 4 hours and serve with rice or quinoa."

"...Avocado toast."



Justice and Gender

Braelyn Havig

Nearly a century after women won the right to vote, the battle to gain equal protection under the law is still ongoing. Although progress has certainly been achieved in many areas of gender equality, it has been a slow journey with as seemingly many setbacks as victories. The Supreme Court has been vital in advancing gender equality under the law, at times being the only vehicle in which to bring about lasting and national change. The Court does have limitations, however, and has both denied and promoted disparate treatment on the basis of sex as well as advanced equality in form but not in fact. Rhetoric from early Supreme Court precedents has limited the progression of equal rights. Even when the Court has acknowledged equal rights, it failed to properly classify gender discrimination under strict scrutiny, thus allowing discrimination and the denial of rights through state interference. Lastly, the Court is severely limited in its ability to promote gender equality as it can only review current statutes according to the protections guaranteed in the constitution.

Past decisions by the Supreme Court stunted the progress for gender equality, as its reasoning and rationale lingers in future decisions. A prominent example is found in *Bradwell v. Illinois* (1873), where Myra Bradwell challenged the constitutionality of an Illinois statute denying women the opportunity to practice law, claiming it violated the 14th Amendment. The Court unanimously upheld the statute, citing it was constitutional as practicing law was not a protected privilege, thus the statute was not “abridging any of the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States.” In his opinion, Justice Bradley asserted: “civil law, and nature herself, has always recognized a wide difference in the respective spheres and destinies of man and woman,” more specifically, that the woman is relegated to the domestic sphere, having “no legal existence separate from her husband.” Nearly a century later, the sentiments of Justice Bradley’s words were echoed in the decision of *Hoyt v. Florida* (1961), where a battered wife who killed her husband was found guilty by an all-male jury. Hoyt challenged the Florida statute that excluded women from the jury unless they purposefully added their name to it; the Court ruled that the statute did not violate the 14th Amendment because women were not specifically excluded and that there was sufficient reason for the statute’s existence. The Court further reasoned that, despite the “emancipation of women from the restrictions and protections of bygone years,” and their advancement to positions previously “reserved to men, wom[en] are] still regarded as the center of home and family life.” The separate sphere doctrine applied to this case demonstrated equality on the books but allowed disparate treatment of gender to continue through its rationale. It was not until *Reed v. Reed* in 1971 that separate spheres doctrine was reversed, nearly 100 years after it was institutionalized.

Despite providing formal equality through some progressive rulings, the Supreme Court does not scrutinize properly laws that discriminate on the basis of gender. There are different levels of scrutiny the Supreme Court uses to evaluate the constitutionality a statute that classifies on the basis of a group, such as gender, to make sure the statute is necessary to achieve an underlying goal. There are three levels of scrutiny, each ascending level requires a law to be more narrowly “tailored” in order to be constitutional. The Court used the “rational relation” classification, the lowest form of scrutiny, in many of their past gender equality cases, which requires a law to only “have a rational relation to a valid state purpose.” Consequently, from the early 1900s to the 1960s, gender discrimination was permitted as long as the purpose for it was not arbitrary and that the state put forth a reason. In the case of *Hoyt v. Florida*, the Court found the state’s justification was rational as the state’s purpose for the statute was to pursue “general welfare,” and thus, they legally could discriminate against women. It was not until *Craig v. Boren* (1976) that the Court decided a more persuasive argument was needed for disparate treatment of gender. *Craig* challenged the constitutionality of a statute barring females under 18 years and males under 21 from buying beer. The Court ruled the statute did violate the Equal Protection Clause, furthermore, it articulated a new standard with which to measure gender-based classifications: intermediate scrutiny. With intermediate scrutiny, a state would have to show the gender-based classification was substantially related to the important state interest—not a rational reason, as mandated by ordinary scrutiny, or a compelling interest, as required by strict scrutiny. The Supreme Court’s decision to create a new level of scrutiny rather than rely on strict scrutiny has allowed discriminatory statutes to survive that may otherwise not have passed, or would be changed before being challenged for its constitutionality.

The Supreme Court is limited in its ability to advance gender equality in the law because it relies both on laws enacted and protections already found in the constitution. In *Equal Means Equal*, Jessica Neuwirth cites that America is one of only a handful of countries in the world who does not have a “constitutional equality provision guaranteeing equal rights for women.” As such, the majority of sex discrimination cases use the 14th Amendment as a basis for remedy, however, as Neuwirth notes, the strategy of using the Equal Protection Clause to strike down sexually disparate statutes was not successful until 1971. Furthermore, the 14th Amendment is limited to state or government action and intent is needed to prove constitutional violations, but discrimination based on sex occurs in every area of life and the amount of evidence to prove intent is not always available. The Court has also used other areas of the constitution as a basis for equal rights, bringing in a substantive aspect of due process. In *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), *Griswold* challenged statutes prohibiting the purposeful prevention of conception. The Supreme Court agreed the case was “within the zone of privacy” and made their ruling with the support of past precedents and the language of the 9th Amendment. The Court held that “the concept of personal liberty protects those personal rights that are fundamental and not confined to the specific terms of the Bill of Rights.” These rights, the Court reasoned, were implicit and necessary in order to make the “express guarantees fully meaningful;” as such, the Court ruled the statutes infringed upon the Due Process clause and violated “basic values ‘implicit in the concept of ordered liberty.’” This concept of the Due Process Clause having a substantive component paved the way for the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision, protecting substantive liberties of a person. Although the focus of substantive law has increased rights that are not explicitly written in the constitution, such as abortion, this approach to gender equality also has limitations. The Court has established these rights in form, but as there are no specific guarantees in the constitution, they cannot always be exercised in fact. States may regulate abortion to a point that is makes it difficult, and to some seemingly impossible, but according to the

decision in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, many of these regulations are not unconstitutional, so long as they do not create an “undue burden,” a “substantial obstacle” that might prevent a woman from exercising her rights. Writer for the *New York Times*, Emily Bazelon, explains how fragile these protections are when she reports that with President Trump in office, it is “no longer an entirely sure bet that a state ban on abortion at six weeks can never stand.” Bazelon asserts that Republican states have been ready for this shift, with “334 new restrictions enacted over the last five years in 32 states;” most of them are attempts to “test the Supreme Court’s willingness to whittle away at women’s access to abortion.” These TRAP laws, which require admitting privileges of abortion doctors or having clinics maintain surgical standards for their facilities, was the basis of *Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt*, which the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional as such restrictions did not pass the undue burden test. Many of these new TRAP laws remain untested and may violate women’s reproductive rights, thus, the Court maintains these protections in form but not in fact. There are no specific provision guaranteeing equal rights on the basis of gender, as such; the Court’s evaluations of statutes and use of certain areas of the constitution to justify equal rights is arbitrary, depending upon the makeup of the Court at that time and societal demands.

The Supreme Court’s role has been vital in advancing equal rights on the basis of gender; however, it is not sufficient to bring about true equality. Even when its rulings seem to advance equal rights, it is often done formally, on the books, but not in actuality if someone cannot meaningfully exercise those rights. The Court is limited by its previous rulings which have allowed disparate treatment based on sex to continue. When the Court has identified protections, they have not held discriminatory statutes to a standard that would properly protect these rights or make them meaningful. Lastly, as there is no specific protection of equal rights on the basis of gender, the Court has looked to other areas of the constitution to find a basis of such protections, leaving some rights vulnerable to excessive government and state regulation. The Supreme Court has clear limitations, the biggest being that there is no specific provision on which it can hang its hat. Delivering justice on a case by case basis undermines rather than strengthens attempts to remedy the disparate treatment of sex. Until such a guarantee exists, such as the Equal Rights Amendment that has been proposed since the 1920s, the Court’s decisions will often produce equality in form but not in fact.

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TROLLOPE'S
AMERICAN WOMEN

FREE TO BE



I first read Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) during the particularly cold and snowy winter of 2014. I picked his name from one of those lists of famous authors; he was one of the only 19th century author that I'd never tried before. Since I'm not a Dickens or Thackeray fan, I didn't expect much, but it only took four chapters of his late Victorian classic, *The Way We Live Now* (1875), to realize that this was going to be a life-changing book for me. He writes about the social issues of his time with more honesty and modernism than his contemporaries. *The Way We Live Now* isn't another *Vanity Fair* or *Bleak House*. Trollope doesn't just comment on social issues through his narration or story, but also through the actions and words of his characters. One of his most unique tropes is his "American Woman." These boisterous women run through his high society London, unashamed of their feminist and democratic ideals to a society that is woefully behind.

Trollope's own mother, Frances Trollope, moved to America in 1827 with her three younger siblings to be a part of the Nashoba Community, an experimental utopian community whose goal was to educate and train slaves to prepare them for emancipation. The community was heavily influenced by Robert Owen's New Harmony utopia of Indiana, and though both ultimately failed their ideals of free love and shared property were forward-thinking, even for our times. Frances moved back to England in 1831 after spending a few years in Cincinnati. She wrote a book upon her return titled *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832) in which she criticized Americans for their lack of civility. Frances Trollope also spoke out strongly against slavery and wrote the first anti-slavery novel, *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* (1836) based on her experiences in Nashoba. This novel influenced Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Trollope himself corresponded with Stowe during his life, and he took an interest in American politics throughout his life, especially during the Civil War. In his own novel *The American Senator* (1877) he explores the stuffy life of the English countryside through the eyes of Elias Gotobed, an American senator from the fictional state of Mikewa. His strong fascination with the United States can be found in several of his works, including two of his most famous, *The Way We Live Now* and *Doctor Thorne*.

Doctor Thorne (1858) was adapted recently into a miniseries written and directed by Julian Fellowes of *Downton Abbey* fame. Alison Brie (known for *Community* on NBC) plays Martha Dunstable, an heiress in her thirties with a rag-to-riches tale so crazy, it can only belong to an American. In the novel, young Frank Gresham is inheriting an estate that has run out of money. He's in love with Mary, an orphan girl of "questionable birth" who lives with her respectable uncle, Doctor Thorne. Frank's family tries to set him up with Miss Dunstable, who's about fifteen years his senior but massively rich. Like, Mr Darcy times a thousand. American *nouveau riche*. Miss Dunstable claims she's in England looking for a husband, but she's turned down a dozen proposals. Long story short – she doesn't marry Frank. In *Doctor Thorne's* sequel *Framley Parsonage*, Miss Dunstable continues to turn down marriage proposals right and left, until she ends up marrying Doctor Thorne himself. It's not quite a romance, but they're both happy.

Half of what makes Miss Dunstable such a hilarious character is how she's written to fit all the American stereotypes. She's allowed into High Society because of her incredible wealth, but she has no idea how to fit in and very little desire to. In *Framley Parsonage* Trollope writes, "Mark Robarts had now turned away, and his attention was suddenly arrested

by the loud voice of Miss Dunstable, who had stumbled across some very dear friends in her passage through the rooms, and who by no means hid from the public her delight upon the occasion. (...) She took hold of the lady and kissed her enthusiastically, and after that grasped both gentleman's hands, shaking them stoutly." A little later he continues, "All this had been said in so loud a voice that it was, as a matter of course, overheard by Mark Robarts – that part of the conversation of course I mean which had come from Miss Dunstable."

It's not just Miss Dunstable's stereotypical flippancy and loud mouth that makes her American – it's what those things represent to the British society. She represents freedom, namely the freedom to choose. Frank is forced to marry money to continue his family name and is bound to responsibilities he never asked for. One of my favorite lines Trollope is, "Love is like any other luxury. You have no right to it unless you can afford it." Though from a different novel, it perfectly encompasses Frank's family's views on the matter before an American shows him there might be another way out. Miss Dunstable has the money, but she has no background. Her own parents were nobodies before they struck gold. In *Doctor Thorne* when she arrives at the home of the ancient family, the de Courceys, the first words out of her mouth are how she traveled from Rome to Paris in a sledge, and didn't sleep in a bed once, followed by explaining how she avoided catching malaria and never observed the Sabbath. She's abrasive, strong, and enjoys getting a rise out of people – particularly men. She laughs, "For myself, I would never listen to a man unless I'd known him for seven years at least. (...) Or perhaps seven hours; eh, Mr Gresham?"

To some degree it's a way of protecting herself from men trying to win her fortune. But it's also just who she is – she is a loud American girl, raised on a farm somewhere out west. She is, as a woman, completely free and self-sufficient. She doesn't need a man – though she enjoys baiting them. Miss Dunstable is free to never choose a husband, but when she eventually does it is truly *her* choice. I hesitate to use the word "feminist," since the concept was just blooming during Trollope's lifetime, but I believe he is one of the best writers of women in his time period. They are more diverse and realistic in both their good qualities and flaws than many of his contemporaries.

The Way We Live Now also features a brash American woman, though Winifred Hurtle isn't anywhere near as respectable as Martha Dunstable. Mrs. Hurtle is an American woman from the west, who carries a gun around and is rumored to have shot a man in Oregon and dueled with her husband. Mrs. Hurtle is a completely different creature from Miss Dunstable. She is highly intelligent, but it is shown again and again that she couldn't make anyone a decent wife. She has much of the same freedom as Miss Dunstable but none of the social status. She's wilder (and poorer) and therefore less able to integrate herself into the society of her lover, Paul. Paul is involved in one of the novel's more complicated subplots – a pyramid scheme funded by British society, to build a railway to connect the United States and Mexico. Paul, a well-off but titleless Englishman, got himself engaged to the widowed (Divorced? Separated? We never really know) Mrs. Hurtle. He returns to England from the midwest to rebuild his life, but the scorned Mrs Hurtle follows him.

What really separates Mrs. Hurtle from Miss Dunstable here is how they handle themselves romantically. Paul treats Mrs. Hurtle terribly, trying to break his engagement because he's fallen for the English rose, Hetta. Mrs. Hurtle has all the freedom and brash recklessness of an American, but without the choice. Paul throws her over for a more sensible and traditional bride. What makes Trollope's writing in *The Way We Live Now* so fascinating is that he never really tells us who to root for. Mrs. Hurtle would make a dreadful wife for an Englishman, but should we agree with Paul's decision to forget her because once in England again he is ashamed of her?

Trollope addresses the unfairness of the social divide in his era, but also the overt sexism. In a terribly uncomfortable scene, after Paul rejects Mrs. Hurtle once and for all, Paul thinks, "They had played a game against each other, and he, with all the inferiority of his intellect to weigh him down, had won, – because he was a man. She (Mrs. Hurtle) had much

time for thinking, and she thought much about these things. He could change his love as often as he pleased and be as good a lover at the end as ever; – whereas she was ruined by his defection. He could look about for a fresh flower and boldly seek his honey; whereas she could only sit and mourn for the sweets of which she had been rifled.” Despite her sordid past, she is one of the softer and more vulnerable characters in the novel as she battles unrequited love. She cried to Paul, when she hears of his attachment to Hetta, “Oh Paul. I am pleading to you for my life. Oh, that I could make you feel that I am pleading for my life.” Despite the pleading her foremost emotion is anger. “She had no plans of revenge yet formed. (..) Could it be possible that she, with all her intellectual gifts as well as those of her outward person, should be overthrown by a man whom well as she loved him, – and she did love him with all her heart, – she regarded as greatly inferior to herself!” In the end Mrs. Hurtle goes to San Francisco with a few of the novel’s other characters, in search of a fresh start. Ultimately, America is where she belongs. She is too evolved as a woman to fit into the sexist society Paul wants to live in.

Mrs. Hurtle tells Paul, “A woman’s weapon is her tongue.” She fights for him using every trick in the book – bribery, threats, begging. But she will never be right for Paul and in the end he wins the traditionally English Hetta. Although it is Paul who is trying to be free of Mrs. Hurtle by breaking their engagement, she’s the one who the reader is relieved for in the end. It’s Mrs. Hurtle’s freedom which is really won. Marriage often feels like a prison in *The Way We Live Now*, and ultimately the wild western Winifred Hurtle isn’t cut out for the restraints of a Victorian marriage.

Anthony Trollope never actually lived in America. What he knew he must have learned second-hand from his mother or friends or newspapers, which perhaps shows in his works as his Americans are caricatures with their abrasive pioneer spirits. But that’s what makes them stand out so boldly in his works. The contrast they make with the British society is a pop of color against a homogeneous background. What makes them so special is that they’re so rare. Almost no 19th century British authors wrote about Americans, or even mentioned the country that was so rapidly rising across the ocean. Trollope’s vivacious characters give modern Americans a snapshot of what we as a country looked like back then to those outside of the States. But what I appreciate most about Trollope’s representation of Americans is that they’re women and they’re free -- free to be, to choose, to come out on top. And that’s how British society viewed Americans in the 19th century through Anthony Trollope’s works, then I’m proud of being a part of that tradition.

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Framley Parsonage, Anthony Trollope. Public Domain Kindle Edition

The Lingering of Absence



Captivity and Release in Poetic Image

Camilla Allision

In his poem *The Cut Pages* (1971), Roy Fisher achieves his image-saturated moodscapes through plagiarizing drab and common notions of freedom and stasis, exploiting the historic precedent of the clichéd image in order to allow universal access into his poetic landscape. Fisher's poetry is simultaneously universal and agonizingly precise, relying at once upon the reader's unique sense of cliché, yet the exposure to idiom only goes so far: the reader is forced to rise above the general and enter into the sharp precision of image, which is constantly changing.

From the platform of generalized idiom and of dead metaphor, Fisher vaults his reader forward into the strangeness of the new image. This sublime exploitation of mediocrity sets Fisher apart as a poet of economy and incredible resourcefulness. This poetry is of the people. There is no restriction of audience to those who are able to grasp the esoteric imagery of *The Cut Pages* from the outset. Instead, Fisher gathers in a wide audience under a common criterion. Everyone is given a fair chance to brave the imminent engulfing of his poetic particle.

Fisher's poetic method is enacted in stages of revelation. Once he has allowed entrance into his poetic image he captures his reader, enforcing a transitory lingering. From this state of momentary stasis the reader is able to comprehend freedom: an exchange of familiar, dead metaphor for engulfment in a new surrogate image. In this paper I will analyze the significance of surrogacy and freedom in *The Cut Pages*, specifically in the context of Fisher's own recognition of its importance: "To origin, which is another patch of sun. We are shown another patch. Not the one. Was the one we tried to look for not the one, whereas this is? Perpetually displaced. Or is this what can be seen, the surrogate, while the true one cannot be perceived?" This perpetual displacement and constant confusion about the identity of "the one" (the poetic particle) illustrates Fisher's method of defamiliarization and alienation of the reader. The surrogate image both conceals and redeems the hidden image – the cliché.

Fisher suffered for years from severe writer's block, and from this experience he produced *The Cut Pages*. The insistence upon holding his reader captive at stages throughout the experience of his poetry is an homage to his own trial, and an insistence that there is something to be gained from stasis: reflection and perspective, a moment to pause within the landscape, to understand it as both image and artifice, dream and device. Marjorie Perloff, in "Cutting-Edge Poetics: Roy Fisher's Language Book" illuminates the significance of Fisher's personal stasis, that *The Cut Pages* was "a document of release, a device for dissolving a prolonged stasis." The state of stasis is at the heart of his poetics. He repeatedly subjects his reader to miniature replications of his own isolation in stasis. We are frozen in the ice, halted inside the pattern of cracks, and through this freezing of identity in poetic element we are able to sense the continuing pattern.

Fisher presents his poetic statement halfway through *The Cut Pages* with the cryptic statement, "Laws for the empty. Patterns for the free." Fisher condemns rote familiarity and dogged recognition, but does not tip the balance to the opposite extreme to prove his point. Rather he exploits dead metaphor and cliché, using it as a mode of access into his poetic image. His aim is not to permanently beguile his reader in icy formalism, but to grant the reader access into his poetic experience, as well as a way out. This eventual freedom is necessary to the ultimate pattern structure of the poem – similar to seeing an aerial view of a completed maze. Freedom of image and metaphor is attained through cliché. Fisher's method is innovative and contrarian: momentary captivity in the clichéd image is as essential as the eventual freedom from it.

In addition to capturing his reader in stages throughout his poems, Fisher also alludes to his system of fragmented cliché in subtle moments throughout *The Cut Pages*. These are moments of revelation and empathy: "Voyage is through partial things, mixtures, edges where tangled solidities give on to broken-up vacancies." The image is striking and beautiful, exemplifying the process the poem itself enacts: fragmentation, and the disintegration of the familiar as it gives way to the rawness of the new. No part of the experience is whole, and that is the point. The image itself fragments:

opposing, paralleling, and framing itself by turns. It is an exquisite schism of identity, a mosaic of elements through which the reader travels as a fragment of memory and expectation.

The individual's past is as germane as present and future in Fisher's reckoning of motion and discovery. Past provides a platform of identity, a plethora of experiences and talents – a place to start, the preexisting platform that the reader must disembark from, into Fisher's landscape. Fisher requires the attentive reader to surrender him or herself to discovery: a visceral exchange of the familiar for the unfamiliar, a surrendering of the body as a fragmented organ of discovery: raw and exposed, sensing change and innovation with untested nerves. But for all he expects of the reader, Fisher is himself a companion, entering his own landscape frequently, offering a voice of reassurance, seeing the path through our eyes and affirming that it is part of the process to be lost, fragmented.

In "Roy Fisher on Location" John Kerrigan explicates Fisher's method of deconstructing and redefining systems of perception: "Though Fisher's urban texts take their bearings from high modernism, rather than from the postmodernist 'city of signs'...he does not imagine that place can be experienced apart from the semiotic and he is alert to what nostrils, fingertips, ears and eyes tell him, not as neutral receptors but as filters on what we can know, as organs which construct space." Fisher constructs a landscape so nuanced, treacherous, and enigmatic that it will yield itself to nothing but the height of active exploration, where every nerve is exposed to the elements, to the construction of the pathway.

In their essay "Osmotic Investigations and Mutant Poems: An Americanist Poetic" Ian F.A. Bell and Meriel Lland discuss the role of the reader in Fisher's landscape: "Such blending and bleeding, such transitional maneuverings which mix and mingle with no settled place, are the features of what Fisher has called his 'osmotic investigations.' And this osmosis, this crossing of borders and boundaries of all kinds, demands the personae not only of the fugitive and outlaw, but of the spy..." The idea that the reader accomplishes more than a visual excavation of Fisher's poetry, as a passive receptacle of information, suggests that our partaking in Fisher's poetic landscape has an effect on its presentation to us. Surrendering to his poetry means a marriage of ourselves with the page.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "surrogate" as, "...substitute, especially a person deputizing for another in a specific role or office." Fisher accomplishes this act of surrogacy through both cliché and syntax, where the reader must reorient themselves to the new image, or the new command. But in order to experience reorientation the reader must de-familiarize: "And a conspiracy to stop a person getting a clear idea / of where his various limbs are; in what and with what mobility." Fisher clearly discloses that the defamiliarization is a conspiracy. This signals the importance of the reader as a spy. The chaos of not being in control of limbs and motions is exactly what is necessary for the reader to understand the fragmented perspective integral to the rest of the poem

An example of syntactical surrogacy is available early on in *The Cut Pages*, when Fisher presents the line: "Don't say *engulf*," a strange, seemingly meaningless, limitation of expression, and follows it on the next line with "Don't say. Engulf." The contrast, expressly, not a pure juxtaposition, de-familiarizes, forces the reader to come to terms with the schism. The two phrases must be placed in opposition and harmony: the first to understand the second, but the second is meaningless if not in contradiction to the first. The command to experience the particle, the element of declaration, and to apply it forward in the pathway, is only accomplished through surrogacy in meaning and syntax. Additionally, "Don't say. Engulf" is precisely what Fisher enacts further down the path, where the cliché is engulfed in the tide of the surrogate image. The device of the surrogate image, therefore, only functions in conjunction with the clichéd image. The two act in symbiosis, and the transition, the exchange of the complete cliché for the new surrogate ending, is swift, barely noticeable, and functions on the level of inference.

Fisher trusts that his reader has a general knowledge of idiom. The entire pattern of *The Cut Pages* rests on this assumption. There are two significant cliché-to-surrogate-meaning images in *The Cut Pages*. The first: "Lower than the treetops all about, there is the ground, the false floor. Always to be going down, arrested and spread, only to run wide, looking for an edge to what's down." Fisher expects the reader to register "run wide" as "run wild" – a common turn of phrase, indicating freedom and lack of restraint. The surrogate image follows the word "arrested," with ensuing imagery of repression, of claustrophobia, of low treetops and downward motion, and because of this the reader is primed to substitute "wild" for "wide" – primed to find freedom. But it is a premature attempt, for the surrogate image is "run wide." The poetic image in the mind of the reader is thus changed drastically.

Now gravity pulls us down and we see liquid running wide, like a river, over the edge. Both the cliché, and our anticipation that it is an answer to the preceding image, is crucial to recognize. The ghost of the cliché remains as an

impression of what could have been, and is engulfed in a cognitive shift, barely perceivable in the overwhelming newness of the surrogate image.

Unsurprisingly, nothing is conventionally logical in *The Cut Pages*. The reader is plunged into Fisher's poetic landscape and taught, through trial and error, that the poetic image is not representation but element. The poetic particle is a platform capable of propelling the reader to the next image, so completing the pathway to freedom. The surrogate images engulf the familiar comfort of cliché from the beginning, yet Fisher often pulls the reader out of the poetry to illuminate the pattern of surrogacy: "Has it moved on from us? Has it moved off us? Are we out from under it? In / under something else?" This authorial, metacritical voice juxtaposes with the lyricism of the poetry, an intentional jarring of tone, a caution against slipping into the comfort of the clichéd image.

The Cut Pages is movement away from the conventional, passive representation of "meaning" and towards the presentation of the image as a living, concrete particle. Marjorie Perloff addresses the claim that Fisher's method of defamiliarization is in the tradition of Russian formalism: "This 'dislocated effect' has been related by Fisher's commentators to the Russian formalist doctrine of 'making it strange' or 'defamiliarization'." But Perloff takes this claim a step further when she questions what Fisher is dislocating his reader from, and why. She focuses on his skeptical sensibility as a poet: "He is a poet drawn to the 'perceptual field' of sensations, who doesn't in fact quite trust those sensations either, hence the need to extrapolate, to explain....that there is 'Nothing else for the puzzled face to see'." Fisher mistrusts sensation because it leads away from innovation, remaining in the realm of mimesis and repetition. Because of this he uses the conventions of dead metaphor as a device to illuminate the speck of truth in the element of sensation before ultimately discarding the physical perception in favor of the new image

Viktor Shklovskij, one of the foremost Russian formalists, pioneered the concept of poetic artifact in his essay "Art as Device," which focuses on this phenomenon in the context of prose. Textual defamiliarization in the formalist setting is significant in light of the shift from symbolic to concrete in Fisher's poetry. Shklovskij claims, "...we discover everywhere the very hallmark of the artistic: that is, an artifact that has been intentionally removed from the domain of automatized perception. It is 'artificially' created by an artist in such a way that the perceiver, pausing in his reading, dwells on the text...The object is perceived not spatially but, as it were, in its temporal continuity. That is, because of this device, the object is brought into view." Shklovskij's observation of the perceiver as pausing and "dwelling" on the specific moments in the text alludes to Fisher's insistence upon stasis as a very real experience for the reader. Lawrence Crawford assesses Shklovskij's intent: "What Shklovskij wants to show is that the operation of defamiliarization and its consequent perception in the literary system is like the winding of a watch...: both 'originate' difference, change, value, motion, presence....what Shklovskij calls 'perception' can be considered a matrix for production of difference." In Crawford's explication, Shklovskij's understanding of defamiliarization as a device for the alteration of perception is compatible with Fisher's, though Fisher draws upon Russian formalism in a way that allows for his own skepticism and for the constant duality of dead metaphor as illumination of innovation.

The symbiosis of cliché and new poetic particle is most evident on pages eleven and twelve of *The Cut Pages*. The pattern through the landscape on these two pages is simultaneously the crux and climax of Fisher's poem. The chemical vibrancy of the interacting poetic particles rises off the page. Fisher clears the canvas before the pattern is drawn: "Cold canvas; naked in the cold canvas, vulnerable to thought but protected in / every possible way by everybody." Here, it feels as if the multitude of readers who have emerged through the comfort of cliché and into the engulfing surrogate meaning are all present together, at the same location in the landscape. Significantly, there is a plurality of readers here: all the organs of discovery are being assessed: "Certain knees, feet, hands, necks, ears. Faces, never. Voices / in discussion. The word was corrupt. The word corroded." The fragmenting of self is a prerequisite for the venture through the new landscape.

The striking pattern of chemical substances - ice, water, and fire, is illuminated on these two pages. None remains in stasis, however. Rather, a zigzagging pattern emerges when the poetic compounds are connected with the eyes or a pencil. In page six of *The Cut Pages* we see: Ice → streams → water → silent water. Within that pattern is the fire: black fire → grey fire → grey sun. The phrase, "Holding the hair over the distance," occurring halfway down the page, catches the reader off-guard. After the black fire turns to grey fire, the reader is primed to read "holding the hair over the fire." The text lures the senses to anticipate this turn of phrase, to look for affirmation of that experience. But it does not come. Instead of fire, we are given "distance" and again the reader is engulfed in discomfort, defamiliarization. The force of distance is illuminated in this poetic landscape, as well as how close it comes to bringing illumination, vision.

Fisher indulges sensation further on in this section of the text: “Every single taste is sweet and hard, there is no contrast, no rough, no dull. One after another after another they come, solid waves. The information / Embedded...” (99). The description of smooth, uniform taste is juxtaposed with lines like, “Cracks appear everywhere, large and small, in all directions, on every surface. Wonderful,” that again indicate the consistence of fragmentation and disintegration of the known in the face of the new. Without the constant fragmentation of landscape, the moments of serenity and uniformity could not be perceived. Lastly, the ice makes one last chemical shift in this pattern of change: “Catering for more than can possibly come: taking advantage of the leeway to garnish everywhere with ice packing / Cubes of light looking in on us at noon.” Again, the text presents a common turn of phrase, cube of _____, goading the reader to say “ice.” The presence of ice on the line immediately above “light” has invited the element into conscious thought. The compulsion to read “ice” instead of “light” is particularly significant here, as ice has been a major part of the pattern on these two pages. The change to light is surprising and critically significant, indicating an absence of physical, weighty material. An exchange of heavy stasis for something immaterial, perpetually in motion, and in which the reader is contained for a brief moment.

The presentation of image as particle reorients the reader to the larger purpose of *The Cut Pages*. A new, concrete pathway is forged through patterns in the text, as exemplified above. The formation of new cognitive pathways in the mind of the reader shatters the fallacy of recognition as comprehension. The pattern blocks the human desire to apply personal meaning to the image, which is no longer a representation of that which is real, but which is real itself: a live, energetic organism capable of chemical reformation and verbal redefinition. In this context, location and mobility – and its antithesis of stasis – is paramount to Fisher’s project of defamiliarization. Without stasis, the shift is imperceptible, and the shift of one element into another is what propels the reader through the poetic landscape.

John Lucas assesses Fisher’s poetic structure and its resistance of conventional realism: “And so while [Fisher] avoids structuring poems in a manner that resembles ‘realist’ narratives, with a beginning, middle, and an end...he equally disavows the poem as existing within a closed circuit.” The idea of “closed-circuit” poetry is the utter antithesis of *The Cut Pages*. Rather than the poetry being a closed circuit, it is a fragmented, torn, sizzling circuit. The patterns of electricity are not uniform, they are syncopated. The rhythm of engulfing surrogacy in poetic image is unique, alienating, something experienced only through risk.

Freedom, then, is the ultimate boon in *The Cut Pages*, but it only comes when the reader is no longer engulfed by Fisher’s surrogate image, but rather when the experience of stasis has propelled the reader into their own “cube of light” a space where the heaviness of the dead metaphor (the ice) has been relinquished, and where the reader is fully able to linger in the absence of familiarity, contemplating the experiences of stasis and engulfment, both of which are opaque in the moment but which give way to an ultimate vision of this poetic pattern.

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V. VISUAL ARTS

DESIGN, HANNAH DIEHL

This work is focused on the double breasted grey twill coat I draped, patterned, and constructed myself at 17. While I have since made higher quality garments, this coat is still a central figure in my personal development as an artist. I combined images of the piece, technical flats, and a moodboard to assign narrative and allow presentation visuals to convey the interactive relationship between client and product in a two-dimensional format.



White zipper pull
W/ Silver teeth
& White tape



(2) 24L Metal buttons



Pale Grey 100%
cotton twill



The concept behind this Coat is exploring a grandiose landscape in isolation, with the exaggerated features of the coat creating an impactful silhouette, while providing a utilitarian aspect to the garment. It has a strong visual impact to help distinguish the figure from the barren landscape they occupy.

Collar stands, providing Full coverage with an Architectural neckline

Back has yoke & Center back seam W/ Decorational topstitching

Separating zipper sewn onto left piece self & inserted into right piece facing

Pocket flap placed Halfway over opening W/ Metal button closure

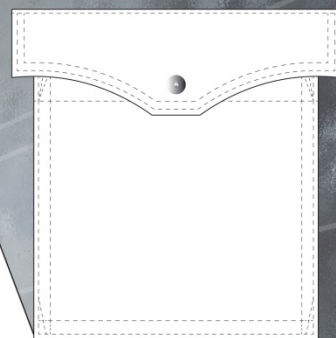
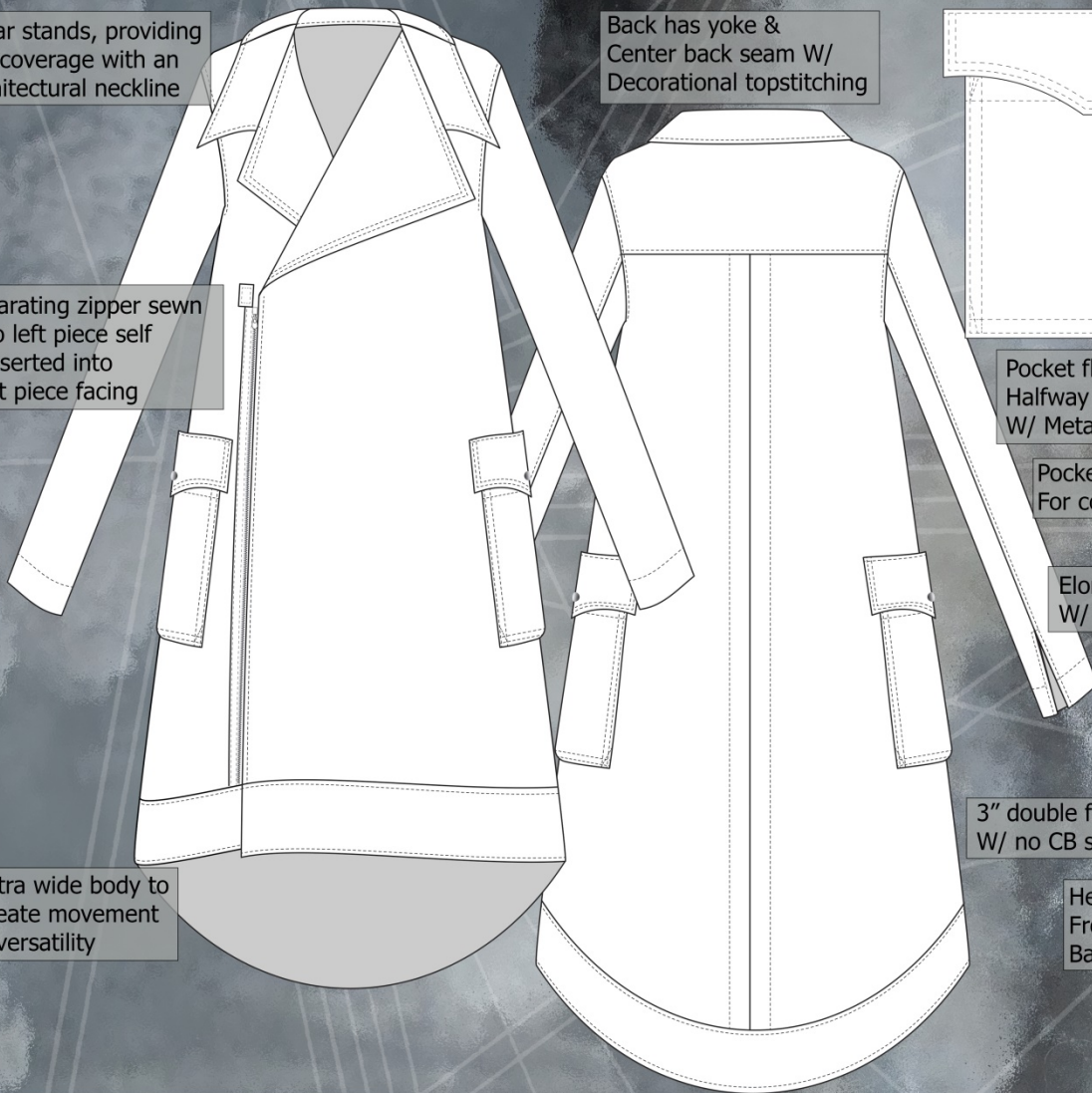
Pocket placed @ hipline For convenient access

Elongated sleeve W/ 4.5" opening

3" double faced hem band W/ no CB seam

Hem length Front- below knee Back-mid-calf

Extra wide body to Create movement & versatility



**IN THE WORLD
THROUGH
WHICH I TRAVEL
I AM ENDLESSLY
CREATING
MYSELF**



Style# Diehl_5400: Pale Grey twill double breasted Coat w/ zipper closure, convertible collar, elongated sleeves, side seam pockets, and 3" hem band



DESIGN, CLAUDIA ROJEK

This jacket was draped and designed with a A-line body and flared sleeves with horsehair installed at all hems for additional support. The raglan sleeves have a structural element on each shoulder to draw attention to the center back opening. One sleeve has an elongated strap that carries over the center back to lay across the front body as a jacket closure, as well as magnets placed along the center back for extra security. The mandarin collar reflects the tailored design and clean attitude of the garment. Although the jacket is all black, the body of the garment consists of two different wool fabrics. A floral design constitutes the left half of the wearer while the remaining pieces are cut in a wide stripe design. The opposition is a nod towards the line between masculine and feminine tailoring silhouettes. I designed this garment as a challenge to modernize the classic jacket while preserving its capabilities for everyday wear.

TAI

inspired

This jacket is designed to redefine societal expectations in classic garments as well as to elevate their standards. This is featured in placing the garment opening on the back and elevating the shoulders.

A mandarin collar protects against the wind while echoing the strength of the sculpted back.



A leather strap secures the jacket and draws attention to the floral wool only found on half the garment.



LORED ATTITUDE

DESIGNED, PATTERNED, AND SEWN BY CLAUDIA ROJEK



structured

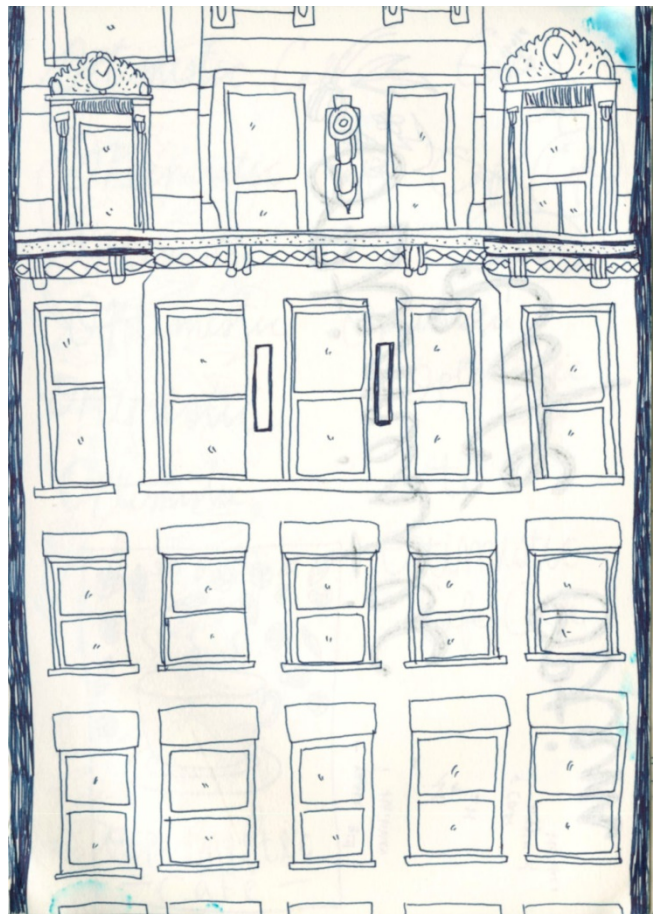
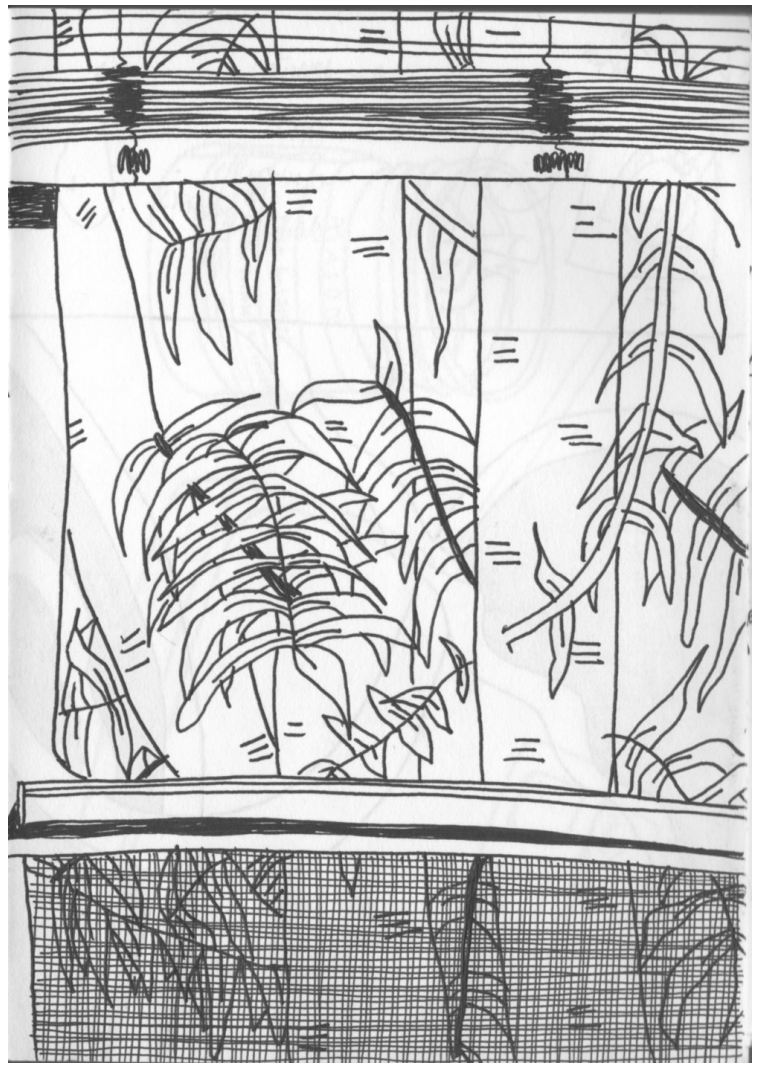
**A study on clean,
tailored lines
with a focus
on shoulder
volume to
highlight
the back
closure**



ART, SYLVIA JUN

Sylvia Jun has struggled with faith, patience, and fortitude. After graduating from Parsons in 2014 she started searching for a career path that satisfies physical needs, challenges creative her side, and gives her the sense of community that she desires from all aspects of her life. In the gaps between retail jobs and bad fits, Sylvia has continued to express herself in her sketching, which often takes the role of a diary for her. The observational sketches represent her attention to detail and desire to see the world honestly -- beautiful as creation, yet broken by the realities of the world we live in. Much of Sylvia's art was inspired by her struggle to find meaningful employment, and the emotional stress and fractures of faith that come along with the search for security and a sense of meaning. Always reaching for perfection and sanctification while battling doubt and human imperfection, Sylvia reconciles her reality with her dreams through faithful study of God's word and her expressive art, which is where she works out the dichotomy of "on Earth as it is in Heaven."

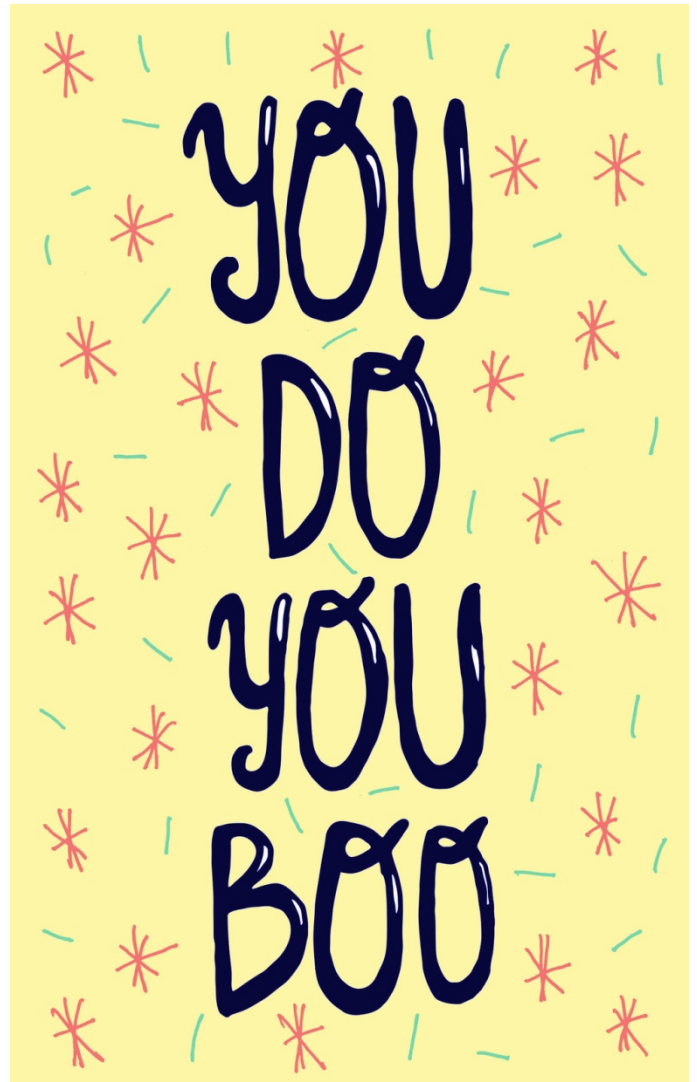
- 1. Observational I
- 2. Observational II
- 3. Observational III





4. Faces

5. "You Do You Boo"



WORDS. SAM GRAY

These poems are from "right left right left," Sam Gray's debut volume of stylized poetry. These vignettes are a collection of her first several years in New York City, filled with unending questions, heartbreak, the quest for identity and the fight for the love of self and of others.

I.

I think this body houses
two
different people

-Artist or Alarmist

IV.

Breathing

&

believing

II.

Be a young thriving thing
and blossom into what
you've always been.

V.

Calm Confidence.
Divine Strength.

III.

Thank you
for teaching me
the importance of

VI.

It's not my job to make you feel
comfortable

b
o
u
n
d
a
r
i
e
s

If only
I could remember that

VII.

fairy by day, witch by night.

X.

Stop.
it's the rain talking.

VIII.

the storm is brewing
I can see it coming
there's no stopping it
She's a force
nature by her side
don't mess with her
and abide
she rumbles
she's waiting

to consume
to give
to refresh

XI.

I worry what I will create will be trash
mediocre
juvenile

But in the end,
I know its not my job
to be my own critic.
I simply need to be myself
and let the chips fall where they may.

I am a different flavor
color
texture

IX.

I don't know what i'm
doing.

XII.

Join me.

sometimes the quietest
changes are the loudest

xiii.

If you cater to everyone
You'll cater to no one.

xiv.

I don't want you to watch me
I want you to see me

xv.

Why do we pick the scabs
of the wounds we want to heal?

XVI.

If you give up on me
it will prove
what I already believe
about myself

-don't

XVIII.

is

Healing

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linear

XVII.

"Why did you do that?"

"Why did you act that way?"

"What's wrong with you?"

"There must be something
wrong with you."

-voices

XIX.

pale, freckled face
why are you looking at me,
what do you really see?
this reflection must be a myth
looking through the brown eyed abyss

the smile that betrays
that will never be the same
I know damn well
all your little games

XX.

It's a disservice to yourself
when you become a slave
for someone else.



PHOTO, AMANDA SAVINO

Amanda is an East Coast native currently living in the land-locked Colorado, who misses and craves the ocean. The seagull is representative of the ocean to her and the freedom one finds there.





Biographies

Amanda Savino is an advocate for physical and mental wellness, with a degree in mental health services. She has studied alternative therapy and complex trauma, and currently works as a health coach in Colorado where she lives with her boyfriend.

Braelyn Havig is a northern California native and currently lives in Orange County where she works as a Special Investigator for the state while completing a masters degree in Criminology, Law and Society.

Brittany Ann Zayas is an adjunct professor at City College and an academic specialist at a New York non-profit, while pursuing her masters in Language and Literacy. A New York native, she lives in Harlem and writes fiction.

Camilla Allison grew up in Santa Fe, NM and has a BA in English studies from the University of New Mexico. She now resides in Albuquerque where she spends most of her time making lattes for punks and raising her two-year-old son.

Claudia Rojek has an AAS in Fashion Design from FIT and is in pursuit of a BFA as well. She enjoys walking through furniture stores and venturing into nature once a month.

Elizabeth Silverstein is a freelance writer and journalist with a BA from Brooklyn College. She and her dog have lived all over the U.S., as she creates story-based content for businesses, magazines, and blogs. Find her at www.hewandweld.com

J. C. Byrd has a BA from St. Josephs and is currently a stay-at-home mother of four. She lives with her family in southern New Jersey and writes poetry and fiction in her spare time.

Katharine Diehl Cortese has a masters from Hunter in Educational Psychology and works as a research coordinator. She is a published poet and lives with her husband and black cat in New Jersey. She is one of the founders of True Girl.

Kelly Uhler is a nursing student in upstate New York. She lives Hornell with her husband, a musician, and their cats.

Hannah Diehl is a fashion design student at FIT, pursuing a BFA in technical design. She likes feeling confused in museums and following historical fashion accounts on Instagram. She lives in Brooklyn with her family.

Magdalynn Hyde was raised in Brooklyn and now lives in Florida where she is an aspiring journalist, writing about media and culture, and local Tampa news.

Marina Palenyy was born in the Ukraine and was raised there until moving to California with her family, when she first learned English at age 12. Now she lives in New York, working as high school writing teacher in the Bronx while completing her masters in Language and Literacy. Marina uses creative nonfiction writing to examine in multilingualism, multiculturalism, and religion.

Meagan Josselyn has a BA from The King's College and works as a production coordinator in the fine jewelry industry in New York. She is a dedicated student of yoga and rock climbing in Brooklyn, where she lives with her husband and cat.

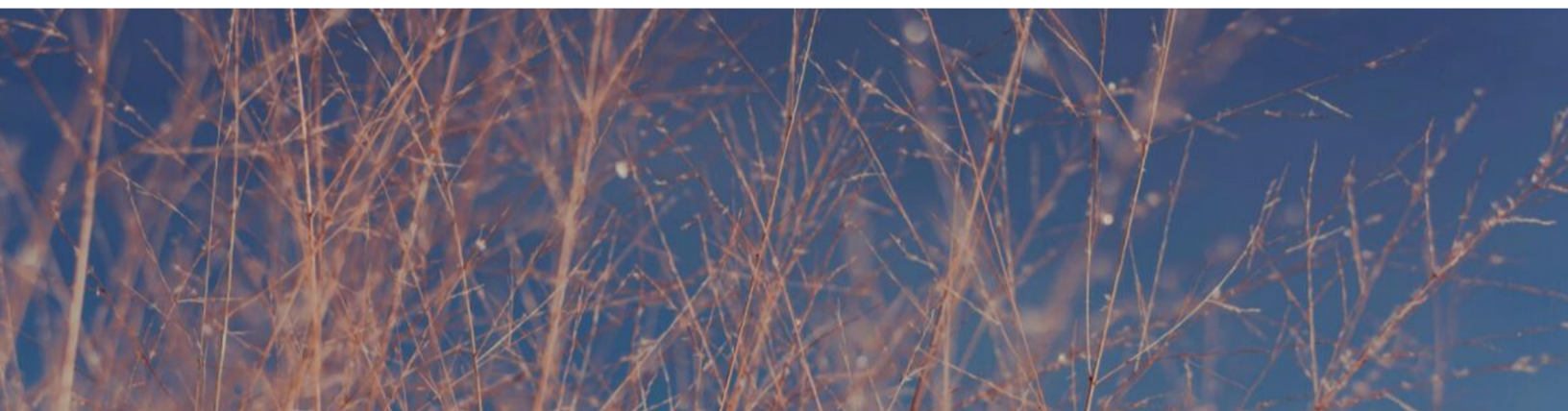
Rachel Alvarado has a bachelors from Brooklyn College in Film Production and has worked for eight years in the film industry. Recently unemployed, she is searching for her next career move while taking martial arts classes with her husband. They are expecting their first child in February.

Sam Gray is an interdisciplinary actress, singer, and poet. She's a Maine native and trained at the Atlantic Acting School in NYC where she now calls home. Find her and her works at www.samgrayactress.com.

Sarah Diehl has a dual bachelors in German Studies and International Business, and currently works in intercultural exchange while pursuing her masters in Public Policy. She grew up in New York, which is where she is trying to read 1,000 books in ten years and hopes to write a memoir on the experience. She is one of the founders of True Girl.

Sarah Finley Purdy has a MA in Fashion and Textile History from the FIT and has worked for within various cultural institutions in Ohio and New York. Her love of objects plays off her appreciation for place and time, all common themes within her writing. She lives in Philadelphia with her husband Alex. Find her work at www.anewlook.blog.

Sylvia Jun has a BFA from Parsons in Illustration and currently works as a UX designer in New York. She grew up in Queens, is an active member of her church, and loves her cat. Find her at www.sylviajun.com.







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