

SHE WOULD, SHE DOES, SHE DID:  
A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

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by

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A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

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## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated to every unique, idiosyncratic and hyper-thoughtful individual. Life would be boring without us—albeit a little less complicated.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would first and foremost like to acknowledge and thank my Thesis Advisor, Professor Twister Marquiss, for guiding me in the right direction and constantly encouraging my growth as a writer. I am so grateful for your mentorship. Thank you to my dear family who has always embraced my quirkiness and supported me in everything I do. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the many people, situations and experiences that inspired this collection. While writing these stories I learned about the significance and beauty of small moments and the eccentricities that make people tick. I also learned about myself, which is always a good thing.

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## **ABSTRACT**

These five stories are centered on a single female character—a very quirky, independent woman in her early thirties. She's highly introverted, and has very OCD tendencies, often making her seem uptight and reserved. As the stories develop, she becomes increasingly open to being spontaneous and stepping out of her comfort zone, as long as it's on her own terms. One thing you'll realize is that she remains nameless throughout the entire collection. I did this for two reasons: the first being that she seems to struggle with her identity at times. Being nameless adds to the vagueness and uncertainty. The second reason is because her character is so unique and eccentric, I didn't want to put her in a box, or allow the reader to associate her with anyone or anything of the same name. The essence of this character is depicted by the writing style: blunt and eccentric. Each of the stories are written in the fast-paced present tense—which symbolizes the immediacy of her decisions—and are based on real-life people and situations that inspired me. My goal for this collection of stories is to embrace and encourage the complexity and idiosyncrasy of everyday life.



## 1. SHE AND THE BUFFALO

I fell in love with a Buffalo. Some nine-year-old kid on the bus was telling me about his love life. His girlfriend from elementary school broke his heart last week, so he started dating Lindsey, the rebound. "Now I have eye candy, and I can make Bridget jealous," he bragged. There's something wrong when a nine-year-old's love life eclipses your own.

My buffalo is porcelain. Some co-worker gave me him for Christmas. Longest relationship I've had since high school, when I dated a mathlete for six weeks. When you've been single for as long as I have, you get desperate. Last week we went to a dinner party for work. Every time we go to a dinner party for work I sneak Buffalo into the men's room and set him on the sink. That way I can truthfully tell my friends that he "stepped out to the restroom." They haven't caught on yet. Sometimes a guy will whisper to another guy, "hey there's a buffalo in the bathroom," and I smile, because I like it when people talk about him. When they ask about my boyfriend, I don't have to be creative. "He's gorgeous and brown."

"Where's he from?" they say.

"Oklahoma," I say.

"What does he do?"

"Wildlife conservation!"

We've dated eight months now. I place him next to my pillow at night and pretend he's not glass. I'm Belle, and he's the beast who hasn't turned into a prince. *Yet*. He sits on my dashboard when I drive. He stares at me when I eat lukewarm oatmeal. He listens to me rant about my shitty job and whether those shoes make me look slutty and if I should

get my oil changed and why I don't get invited to weddings. Buffalo is better than a human because he doesn't talk. He can't say, "you should really wear makeup today," or, "you're acting just like your mother." He's mute. Try finding a man like that these days. Get yourself a buffalo. One look into those expressionless eyes and I swoon. We get married next month. I proposed and he didn't say no. Won't my family be surprised?

A few weeks ago my best friend and her boyfriend came over for dinner. All four of us were sitting at my dining room table. Buffalo and I were wearing matching red-plaid shirts. I was going to ask her to be my maid of honor.

"So where is your fiancé?" Gwen asked.

"Before I introduce y'all, I have a question. Will you be my maid of honor?" I asked.

"Well duh!" she said, laughing. "But seriously, I want to meet this guy! Where is he?"

I pointed.

She glanced at Buffalo.

"He gave you that? Cute. Is he coming late?"

"No Gwen."

I felt the need to make a statement. With both hands I grabbed Buffalo and planted a passionate kiss on his nose. I blushed. It was our first romantic exchange in front of dinner guests.

"This is Buffalo," I said.

Gwen's boyfriend dropped his forkful of mashed potatoes.

Gwen stared. "Sweetie. What's going on?"

"I'm in love," I said.

A good awkward pause.

Gwen turned to her boyfriend. "Um, Honey, can you give us a minute?"

They whispered back and forth. I heard Gwen say, "I'll be fine. You go out to the car."

I laughed. As if Buffalo would do anything inappropriate.

Once her boyfriend left the room, Gwen sat next to me and said, "I don't know what's going on, but I'm going to help you. You've been working too much. You need a break."

My body tensed like the pre-stages of rigor mortis.

"You shouldn't be saying this in front of *him*." I picked up Buffalo and took him to the family room, and turned on the Western Channel so he couldn't hear our conversation. I walked back to the dining table. "I'm not working too much. I'm completely happy. Stop treating me like a lunatic."

Gwen bit her lip.

"No, hun, of course not. But—."

"But what?"

"Ok. I'll be your maid of honor on one condition: you and Buffalo get couples' counseling."

"Alright," I said.

"Good. *Good*. Ok. This really great woman helped Chris and me through some stuff. I'll call her for you."

"If you really think it's necessary."

"All couples should have counseling before they get married," she said. "But Chris is out in the car, so I think I should go now. See you Friday?"

"Sure," I said. "I'll ask Buffalo."

"You do that."

I spoke to Buffalo that night, but when I asked him what he thought he just stared at me. "I know," I said. "I don't want to go either. We're doing this for Gwen."

On Friday morning Buffalo and I showed up to the office of Dr. Roberts. The waiting room was dismal. Four chairs, a small flat-screen TV playing Food Network and a water dispenser. I checked us both in, and Buffalo sat next to me. As I was filling out paperwork, a couple walked in with a child and sat in the two remaining chairs. The woman looked at Buffalo, then at me, pointed to Buffalo's seat, and said:

"Would you mind?"

"What do you mean?" I said.

"My husband would like to sit down."

"The seat is taken."

"There's nobody in that seat!"

"My fiancé's in that seat!"

"That's a buffalo!"

I would have continued the argument but my name got called, so I picked up Buffalo and we followed the receptionist through the door, down the hallway and into the first room on the right.

"Good morning!" a voice boomed as we walked in.

Dr. Roberts was a tall, abrasive-looking woman with fake blond hair and a

massive dimple on her right cheek that could store nuts for the winter.

"Hey," I said.

"So what brings you here today?"

Her accent was deeply Texan. I recognized it because my uncle is from Texas.

When I was a kid we took a family road trip and he pointed out of the passenger window and said, "Look! There's a hoe!" Half of us thought he saw a loose woman outside the window, and the less dirty minded thought he was talking about the garden tool. Turns out he actually saw a massive hole, but couldn't pronounce his "L's."

"We are here to receive couples counseling before we get married," I replied.

"Okay, so where's the groom-to-be?"

"Right here."

"Where, honey?"

"Right here." I set Buffalo down in front of her.

Silence.

"If you can't do it, that's fine. I'm just here because my friend won't be my maid of honor otherwise."

"I think I can make time for this," she said, observing me closely.

I glanced around the room. There was a glass Longhorn acting as a paperweight on her desk that made me uncomfortable. It was looking right at Buffalo. I gingerly reached out to turn Buffalo back towards me. I would leave him with no opportunity to cheat. She watched me do this.

"So how long have the two of you been together?" she asked.

"Eight months."

"And what seems to be the problem with the relationship?"

"There's no problem."

"Okay. I'm going to be honest with you, I am a couples' counselor, but first and foremost I'm a psychiatrist, and if you really want help, we need to discuss why you feel a relationship with an inanimate object is a healthy relationship worth continuing."

"I'm in love," I said, simply.

"Do you think it's normal to have romantic feelings towards a buffalo figurine?"

"I am not a normal person."

"Okay. Can you explain to me why you chose a figurine over, say, a human being?"

"Human beings are unreliable. Buffalo is always reliable."

"You have a fear of change?"

"No. I just like a predictable boyfriend."

Her voice lowered. "Are you—intimate with Buffalo?"

"Define *intimate*."

"Sexual relations. Do you have sexual relations with this figurine?" She glanced nervously at Buffalo.

"That would be stupid," I said.

"So you don't, then?"

"We kiss."

"Does he return the kiss?" she asked.

"Of course not. He's shy."

I could tell she was completely baffled. This is a common response when someone finds out you date a Buffalo. I remember the last time Buffalo and I were out on date night. I asked for a table for two, and the waiter almost dropped the iced tea pitcher when I kissed Buffalo on the nose, sat him down in the seat across from me and asked for two menus.

Our counseling appointments continued for another eight weeks. The sessions grew shorter and shorter, because I don't talk a lot, and Buffalo doesn't talk. It was around the seventh week when I started to notice something fishy. At the end of our appointment, Dr. Rogers said, "How would you feel if I took care of Buffalo this week?"

I was surprised. Then I became salty.

"Dr. Rogers, are you dating anyone?" I said.

"I don't generally discuss my personal life with patients, but, yes, I am dating a guy."

"Well, when you feel like sending your boyfriend home with me for a week, I'll let you have Buffalo."

She got red. "I hope you don't think—I just thought it would give me some time to talk with him and analyze your rather singular situation."

I laughed. "Dr. Rogers, I think the wrong person is receiving therapy. I'll come to our appointment next week because I already paid for it, but this isn't working."

I picked up Buffalo and walked out.

I called Gwen that night. "I think Dr. Rogers is hitting on Buffalo," I said.

"Uh, doubtful!" she laughed. "Have you even *seen* her boyfriend? He's a fricken J. Crew model!"

"I guess she has a thing for muscles," I said. "You know, Buffalo has a lot of muscles, too."

"Ridiculous. What makes you think that?"

"She wanted to take him home with her for the week."

"No offense, hun, but she probably just wanted you to spend some time without Buffalo so you'd start paying attention to humans. Don't be so paranoid."

I decided that was a good time to end the conversation.

We showed up to our last appointment, and the waiting room was empty except for a tall, dark-haired, very attractive guy sitting in one of the chairs and chatting with the receptionist. He looked up and smiled as I walked in. "You must be the model," I said bluntly.

"Wow! I didn't know Regina talked about me," he said pleasantly.

"She doesn't. My friend told me."

"Which friend?"

"Gwen."

"Gwen Tillman? She's nice. So you here for couple's counseling?" he asked.

"Yep." I pointed to Buffalo.

He looked confused, so I said, "My boyfriend is a buffalo. Do you think that's weird?"

"Do *you* think it's weird?"

"No."

"Then nope! I say live and let live, ya know?"

I stared at him intently. "You're an unusual specimen," I remarked. "Most people



think I'm insane."

"Everyone is insane, just at different levels," he said, laughing.

"So what are you doing here?"

"I'm waiting to take Regina to lunch," he said.

My name got called. "Gotta go make smalltalk with your girlfriend now," I said.

"Have fun!" He grinned.

Dr. Rogers was rhythmically tapping her purple acrylic nails on the desk as Buffalo and I walked in. "Hey, y'all!" she said, almost mechanically.

"Hi."

We talked for awhile about healthy relationships, how to maintain an open line of communication and how to handle conflict. Pretty much the stuff covered during the first two weeks of my Comm 1310 class in college. It was boring, but I gave it a chance cause I knew it was our last appointment. She ended her little lecture with: "I've been thinking a lot about your situation, and (I know you found this offensive last time) I really do think it would be best if ya'll spent some time apart. You both need to figure out who you are as individuals before you take the next step in your relationship. I would be more than happy to take care of Buffalo for a week."

I frowned. "You have a crush on Buffalo, don't you?"

"Your feelings of insecurity are very natural, but I'd—."

"Homewrecker."

"Let's talk about why you feel I'm trying to steal your boyfriend."

"Let's not. We're gonna go now." I stood up, flung my purse over my shoulder

and reached to pick up Buffalo. Then, Dr. Rogers snatched him up, cradled him in her arms and said, "He's not going anywhere."

"Give me my fiancé," I said.

"No. He's going home with me. It will be best for both of you."

"Your boyfriend is sitting outside. Would you like me to call him in here?"

"He's just a casual thing. The feelings Buffalo and I share are so much deeper!"

Next thing I knew, we were both engaged in a tug-of-war struggle. Regina had Buffalo's head, and I was desperately trying to hold onto the tail.

Our battle was noisy, and both the receptionist and Regina's boyfriend rushed in to rescue her from what they must have thought was a dangerous lunatic. Me.

"Gina what's going on?" he shouted.

"Just leave, Ryan! I've got this—it's—controlled!"

"Your girlfriend is trying to steal my fiancé!" I shouted back at him.

"Holy shit. Is that true Regina?"

My hands were sweaty.

Regina jerked Buffalo from my hands.

She lost control.

He sailed across the room.

Oh Buffalo.

He hit the bookcase and shattered into hundreds of fragments all over her office.

I stared, dumbfounded as she fell to her knees and started picking up large chunks of Buffalo, weeping hysterically and moaning, "Oh god, I've killed you!"

Ryan and the receptionist observed the scene like interested puppies.

When it finally registered that Buffalo was shards beyond repair, I knew I didn't want to marry him.

Ryan turned to me, looked me dead in the eye and asked, "Would you like to have lunch?"

"Yeah," I said. "That'd be nice."

## 2. SHE AND THE MODEL

"Good morning, You," Ryan whispers.

I pretend to be asleep. I'm not ready for this reality.

He pokes my ear. "Hey, wake up."

My eyelids are doing that little quivery thing they do when they've decided on treason. I open one of them.

"Gotta pee!" I jump out of bed and run to the bathroom.

Really I just need a moment to stare at myself in the mirror.

I'm wearing a stained, oversized sweatshirt I won on a Caribbean cruise eight years ago, my hair's in disheveled pigtail braids and last night's mascara is smeared under my eyes. I look like a 90s heroin model.

I get closer to the mirror and stare at my lips as they form the sentence in slow motion: "You just slept with a supermodel."

My revelation is shocking.

I stare at myself a little harder, and make sure that my hair is still brown, and that my ear freckle hasn't changed sides. Apparently this isn't an alternate universe.

Ryan yells, "Want to grab brunch?"

"Give me a second."

I rinse my face off and step into my closet.

Brunch? What the hell does one wear to brunch? A question I have never asked before. I scan my options. Everything shouts: "mature single woman with no love life." I espy a red flannel shirt in the back. That, and a pair of distressed mom jeans is my winning combo. I want to wear boots, but I remember a story in the news about a pig in

Northern England that wears custom designed Wellington boots because it has a mud phobia. Yes, sneakers are a better choice.

Back in the bedroom. Ryan has dressed, made the bed and is on the phone making reservations. I observe him from a distance, because I like to watch people talk on the phone. It's interesting to observe the differences in body language when they're talking versus listening. I once had a teacher in high school that would bite her No. 2 pencil from eraser to lead, making tiny, evenly spaced teeth marks every time she listened on the phone. I've analyzed myself, as well. If I'm talking, I deliberately walk around the borders of my large bedroom rug, making sure to step on every third red dot and never stepping on the blue ones. Ryan just sits on the edge of my bed, tapping his foot lightly while he talks.

"You ready?" he asks, sliding his phone into his back pocket.

"Yep. Where are we going?"

"Surprise," he says, winking.

I decide not to inform him that I don't like surprises.

The restaurant turns out to be a trendy, rustic, outdoor café known for complex mimosas and eggs Benedict. I'm pretty sure it must be a restaurant requirement for the waitresses to be tall, athletic and 22. One of these gorgeous specimens recognizes Ryan and walks over to our table.

"Hi there, handsome!" she says, giving him a flirtatious pat on the shoulder.

"Long time no see!"

"Georgia! Hey!" Ryan says, turning around in his chair. "You our waitress today?"

"I can pull a few strings," she says, grinning.

"Awesome."

Her name would be Georgia, I think to myself. She takes our drink order and I observe her closely as she walks back inside. She most definitely has history with Ryan.

He's looking at the menu.

"Whatcha gonna get?" I ask.

"Really terrific steak and eggs here," he says.

"Like actual steak?"

"Yeah! It's a big old New York strip with homestyle potatoes and fried eggs. They serve it on a breadboard with a huge steak knife in the middle."

"Damn. Sounds good," I say.

Georgia comes back with our drinks, and we both order the steak and eggs.

"You always get the same thing!" she says, giggling.

As soon as she leaves there's a brief silence that needs to be filled. Being particularly bad at small talk, I pull out my phone and search for, "Questions to ask a guy on a brunch date." A *Huffington Post* article titled, "28 questions to Ask a Date" pops up and I land on number seven: "Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?"

I ask him this. He looks both startled and amused.

"Well, I can't say I've ever thought about that before. I guess I'd have to say either old age or maybe like a motorcycle accident."

"Oh. Do you ride a motorcycle?" I ask.

"No. But I could see myself as a motorcycle dude."

I wince. Not because of the motorcycle thing, but because of the word *dude*. I

once had a friend that informed me that the definition of dude was "infected hair on an elephant's butt."

Our food arrives. Georgia carries a breadboard in each hand. She smiles and sets mine down in front of me and then turns toward Ryan. A hornet buzzes past her and she panics, jerking her elbow back. I watch in horror as the steak knife becomes dislodged from the remaining board and falls, sharp-end down onto Ryan's flip-flopped foot.

"Oh my God!" she screams.

Ryan stares at his profusely bleeding foot and his face goes white. "I think I need to go to the ER," he says.

"Of course," I say. "Can you make it to the car? I'll drive you."

"I'm so sorry, Ryan!" Georgia says, tears filling her large blue eyes. "I'm coming with you to the hospital!"

"That's really not necessary," I interject.

"No, I am. This is all my fault," she says, practically wailing.

Quite a crowd of waiters and interested bystanders have collected around Ryan by now, and the restaurant manager is running towards him with wet towels, most likely with the sheer ulterior motive of begging him not to sue the restaurant.

"Okay, let's get you to the car," I say calmly.

"Yeah that'd be great," he replies.

Luckily the knife isn't lodged inside his foot, as it fell out during impact. I don't think I could drive knowing that there's a knife wiggling around in someone's flesh. We wrap his foot in the towels and I help him hobble to the passenger side of his car. We leave a trail of blood on the sidewalk, like a gory Hansel and Gretel.

Georgia follows behind us, still crying uncontrollably. I'm getting annoyed.

"If you're coming, you really gotta stop that," I say bluntly.

"I'm sorry. I just can't believe I did that," she says.

"Yeah. Me neither."

On the way to the hospital, Ryan looks at me and says, "Your question earlier. I guess I'm gonna die by the knife."

This response prompts another burst of sobs from Georgia in the backseat.

"Georgia, Sweetie, it's okay," he says. "It was just an accident."

"I'm so getting fired for this."

Neither one of us disagree.

We arrive at the door of the ER, I put the car in park and run inside to ask for a wheelchair. A nurse comes back with me, and I open the car door.

"Ryan!" the nurse says, surprised.

"Wow! Rebecca! I totally forgot you worked here!" he says, giving her a weak smile.

"What happened to you?"

"I was on a brunch date, and a steak knife fell on my foot."

"Wow. Well let's get you fixed up," she says, helping him into the wheelchair.

She has history with Ryan, too. It's obvious by her seductive tone of voice.

Georgia intervenes. "I'm the one who dropped it!" she says, for credit, rushing over to him and rubbing him on the shoulder.

This is what it's like to date a supermodel, I realize.

They start wheeling him inside the building.



"I'm gonna park the car," I say.

I get back in his BMW and briefly ponder just driving away. I decide against this, though, as Ryan knows where I live. I park and walk back inside the hospital, heading towards the front desk.

I don't know his last name. I ask anyway.

The receptionist eyes me suspiciously.

"We were on a date, and a steak knife got dropped on his foot," I say.

"And you don't know his last name?" she says.

"A nurse named Rebecca took him to a room."

"Did you drop the knife?"

"No."

"Huh. Let me make a call," she says, a little perturbed.

A few minutes later she waves me back over and says, "There's a Ryan Patterson matching the steak knife description in room 305."

"Thanks."

I find my way to 305 and peek into the room. There's Ryan, leg stretched out on the table with Rebecca and two attractive nurses hovering around him, preparing to inject his foot with anesthetic while Georgia sits in the chair next to him, still condensating.

I decide that I don't want to date a model.

I walk down the hall to the nurses' station and toss the keys down. "Could you give these to a patient for me?" I say. "Ryan Patterson. He's a supermodel with a steak knife injury." I walk away.

I get onto the elevator, look at the woman next to me and ask, "Do you ever think

about the meaning of life?"

"All the time," she says, rolling her eyes.

I wasn't expecting a response. It's around this time that I realize she's hella pregnant and has probably been heavily considering the meaning of life for the past 8 months.

"Have fun with that," I say, nodding toward her stomach as I get off the elevator. I walk outside and call a cab. The thought of going home doesn't appeal to me, so I make sure I have my good credit card, and I ask the taxi company to send me someone who needs money and wants to drive for awhile. I've already broken up with Ryan, but he doesn't know that yet, so I take an old receipt from the bottom of my purse and write on the back, "You're gorgeous and the sex was great, but my cat doesn't like you. Let's break up."

He doesn't need to know that I don't have a cat.

I tuck the receipt into his windshield wipers and wonder if he's gonna think he got a ticket.

### 3. SHE AND THE CAB GUY

David. David the tall, tan cab driver. He's probably in his mid-thirties, but looks deceptively older because of a large handlebar mustache. He's pretty good-natured, seeing as he's agreeing to drive me all over the city on a whim. I become painfully aware of the fact that I'm going to have a lot to pay off on my credit card this month. I decide it's okay. Adventure is worth it.

"We're going to play a game," I say. "We're going to make a list of all the most non-touristy things to do in the city. We'll be anti-tourists."

"You're a strange lady," he says, lingering a little bit on the word *strange*.

"Where's the weirdest place someone's ever asked you to take them?" I ask.

"There's a toilet seat art museum. That's up there with the weirdest."

"Perfect! Let's start there."

David starts driving.

Atmosphere is important to me, and something about the atmosphere in the back seat of the cab isn't conducive to a day of anti-tourism. I once had an Alexander Technique instructor that had to step out of the room because her "aura" needed to be cleansed. However, not being familiar with the complexity of aura cleansing, I elect to move to the front. I unbuckle my seat belt and stick one of my legs in-between the two front seats, trying to wiggle myself through the small opening. I used to do this all the time as a child, but I suppose this is what getting old is like.

I think I shock David. I also think that this won't be the only time I shock David today.

"Hello," I say, when I finally squeeze myself through.

He gives me a brief side-eye.

"Do you like to talk, David?" I ask.

"Depends," he says.

"I don't particularly like to, but if we're going to a toilet seat museum together, I feel like we should get to know each other," I say. "What do you do when you're not driving a cab?"

"I'm a professional mattress jumper."

I wasn't expecting that. I could feel a facial expression forming.

"A what?" I ask.

"Professional mattress jumper," he repeats. "I basically compress all the layers of cotton batting by jumping on them and getting rid of lumps."

"How did you get started doing that?" I ask.

"I had a summer job at a mattress company. I heard about mattress jumpers and I like jumping. It's a good gig."

"Yeah," I say.

"That's why I'm also a cab driver. I spend so many hours jumping, it's nice to have a job where I can sit for awhile."

I suddenly find him overwhelmingly attractive.

"Are you single, David?" I ask bluntly.

"Yep."

A bit of silence.

"So what do you do?" he asks, finally.

"I work at a bank."

"You don't seem like the bank-working type of person," he says, reflectively.

I think about that for a second. I wonder what it is about a person's seemingness that determines what sort of job they should have. I look at him intently. "So what do I seem like?" I ask.

"Kinda neurotic—but in a cute way," He says, winking at me. "I could see you as like an elementary school teacher. Or maybe an author."

I ponder this response momentarily. I also have a fluttery feeling in my stomach from his wink.

"Huh," is all I say.

"Well, we're here at the toilet museum," he says, pulling into a parking space.

"Come with me," I say.

We step out of the car and I hear a kid's voice behind me shout, "I speak for the potted plants!"

This strikes me as peculiar. I turn around.

A ten-year-old boy is holding a protest sign with a poorly drawn tomato plant on the front.

"This is the essence of anti-tourism," I whisper to David.

"Hey, Kid," I say.

"Hey," he says, eyeing me skeptically.

"Why are you protesting?"

"A nursery by my house is about to dump all the plants that nobody wants to buy. It's a waste. They should plant them in a community garden."

"I can get behind that," I say.

I pick up one of his other signs (a bell pepper) and we march around the parking lot yelling, "We speak for the potted plants!" in unison.

We do this for ten minutes. My voice gets hoarse so I quit and return to David.

"You done?" he asks.

"Yes," I say.

We walk into the toilet museum and I grab David's hand.

"Kiss me," I say.

"Here?"

"A tourist would expect to be kissed somewhere romantic. But us, we're going to make out surrounded by toilet seats. It's exceptional."

He pulls me in and we kiss.

This lasts until I decide it should stop. Just like music, there's a rhythm to intimacy.

I open my eyes. The first toilet seat I see is a Sumo wrestler vomiting frogs. I think it's fortunate I didn't see this before we kissed.

"Want to go to the next place?" I ask.

"Where are we headed?"

"I'm hungry. A tourist would go to a fancy wine bar and order a charcuterie platter. I want to find a punk rock bar with bad whiskey and greasy French fries."

"Do you listen to punk rock?" he asks.

"No. But I bet it's delightful. C'mon."

We drive for awhile and finally David pulls into a small, dumpy-looking place with no windows.

"This is perfect," I say.

"It's the only punk rock bar I know of. It's cheap and sketchy and they have outhouses."

The inside is almost as dismal as the outside. There are stacks of vinyl records lining the walls, and a big record player sits on the bar. Only one bartender is working, and he looks stunningly gothic. He's kinda pudgy, shoulder-length black, straggly hair, and is wearing a black t-shirt and black cadet cap.

"What's your name?" I ask.

"Matt," he says, drying a short glass with a soiled towel.

"Matt, can I get two Manhattans made with your worst whiskey?" I ask.

He stops drying the glass.

"And let's be different. Can you serve them in wine glasses?"

David rolls his eyes.

"We're gonna puke," he says, grimacing.

"Absolutely," I say.

Matt just shrugs and pulls two wine glasses off the shelf. I get the impression that he doesn't like his job.

I dig through a stack of records on the bar. I'm no connoisseur of Punk, so I pull out the only one I recognize, which happens to be The Sex Pistols *Never Mind The Bollocks*.

"Can I stick this in the record player?" I ask Matt.

"Sure," he says.

David and I are the only people in the bar, so I don't feel bad cranking up the

volume.

I start dancing very poorly, because dancing poorly is the only way to dance to punk rock.

"Join me!" I shout at David.

"Watching you is much more entertaining!" he shouts back.

Matt shoves wine glasses towards us.

"Let's try the misery," I say.

We both take a sip, and the whiskey is so sufficiently bad that it makes us cough.

"This reminds me of college," David says.

"This reminds me of my twenty-fifth birthday," I say.

David looks at me for the story.

"My friends threw me a surprise party at my apartment, and the only alcohol I had was a bottle of gas-station whiskey that had been under my sink. I threw up in my fishbowl that night."

"Did the fish survive?" he asks.

"No."

"Awful way to die."

I laugh. I then wonder if it's rude to laugh inside a wine glass.

I say: "You make fries here, Matt?"

"Not sure how old the grease is, but okay," he says. "If anyone comes in just holler at me."

Matt goes to the kitchen.

"Get up!" I tell David.



"Why?"

"We're gonna dance on the bar."

"You're insane."

"Probably. Get up."

We climb the barstools and start dancing.

Matt comes back from the kitchen with a basket of fries. He doesn't care that we're on top of the bar.

"You're cool, Matt," I say.

He shrugs.

We hop off the bar and nibble on the fries. Disgusting.

David and I exchange glances.

We agree to leave.

"What's next?" he says.

"You'll see. Can I drive for awhile?"

"Yup."

Forty-five minutes later we pass a shopping mall and I'm inspired. I park in the lot.

"Have some shopping to do?" he says.

"No. Hate shopping. We're gonna go mess with the kiosk salespeople."

Our first victim is some guy who tries to sell us a curling iron that will "Rock my world."

I walk up to him and ask, "have you ever curled your hair with this?"

"It's only \$24.99!" he says.

Two can play at this game. I pull a can of coconut milk from my purse.

"Have you ever tried this amazing dairy-free milk?" I ask.

He's flummoxed.

"It's only three bucks. It's a steel." I say.

David starts laughing. I can't tell if it's because my kiosk man looks so out of his element or because I keep a can of coconut milk in my purse. I decide I've had enough of messing with the kiosk man.

"It's your turn," I say, turning to David.

"Okay," he says.

We walk for awhile and he points out a girl selling phone cases.

"Baby!" he shouts at her. "It's been years!"

She looks confused.

"Oh my god! I haven't seen you since that toga party!"

"Uh—."

"Remember when we made out in that upstairs closet?"

"No—."

"We were both plastered!"

"I don't think we--."

"That was such a fun night. Man, do you still keep in touch with any of the college buddies?"

"Who are y—."

"Hey great to see you, girl! I gotta help my lady with her shopping. Hope to run into you again soon!"

We walk away. I am impressed. This was better than the coconut milk.

"How can we possibly top that?" I ask.

"We can't. I think I know where we can go next, though. Are you a betting girl?"

"I can be."

We drive for a while and David tells me to close my eyes.

"This is the part where I learn you're a serial killer, isn't it?" I ask.

"Open your eyes," he says.

The first thing I see is a tiny racetrack. The second thing I see is a multitude of small wiener dogs.

"It's the annual Dachshund race," he says. "They wear costumes and everything."

The dog owners start lining up their wieners. I decide to root for the one in the Barney-the-Dinosaur costume. David roots for little Bob Marley. Neither Barney nor Marley win. We're both out sixty bucks.

Something about racing wiener dogs makes me think about the complexity of life. This feeling passes quickly when I realize that there is nothing very complex about racing wiener dogs. Or losing money.

"You know what I want to do, because life is short and should be lived spontaneously?" I ask.

"What?"

"I want to go downtown, find a horse and carriage and go through a fast-food drive thru."

"And while we're riding in the carriage, we will write cheerful notes to homeless people and leave them around the city."

"We need to write them with a quill pen and ink pot."

"Where the hell are you going to find one of those?" he asks.

"I know places," I say, mysteriously. "There's an antique store a couple miles down the road. Let's go there."

We walk into the store and the first thing I see is the vintage clothing section. There's a dress that looks like Aunt Bea from The Andy Griffith Show and I must have it. I try it on and it's four sizes too big, but size doesn't matter. I find a pair of broken suspenders and a fedora for David. We'll do this right.

"Have any quill pens and ink here?" I ask someone with a nametag.

"In the back with the books," he says.

We make our purchases and head downtown.

We walk for a long-ass time before we finally hail a horse and carriage.

David and I look homeless ourselves, and we get a lot of attention as we ride down main street, tossing our handwritten homeless-person notes down on the ground. I don't think a single homeless person will open them. Maybe a homeless bird.

I turn to David and say, "This is good. Typing is too conventional. I need to feel the words forming. There's authenticity in the smudge marks."

I look at my hand, covered in blue ink, and press it to my face. Now I have blue ink on my forehead.

"I've been marked by the evening," I say.

"Or the evening's been marked by you," he says.

The carriage finally pulls into the fast food drive thru, and I tell the driver to order whatever she'd like. She orders three chocolate milkshakes.

"This was a good day," I say to David.

David doesn't respond. I look over at him, and he's laughing in his sleep.

I ask the driver to make sure he gets back to his car okay. "This is where I get off."

I kiss David on the cheek, take a slurp of my milkshake, and descend the carriage.

And I think: cute cab drivers are sometimes mattress jumpers.

#### 4. SHE AND THE LAST MAN IN THE GYM

I'm in a gym. I don't know why I'm in a gym, because I don't exercise. I do take the stairs at work, but that's only to avoid small confined spaces and elevator small-talk. Why am I in a gym? My friend dragged me here to find a man. She swears that a buff and brawny six-foot-two male is going to take one look at me and decide that I shall be his life mate. I catch my reflection in a mirror. This theory shall not be proven today. No gym hunk is going to swoon over a woman wearing her dad's old t-shirt and some baggy basketball shorts. I haven't shaved my legs.

Tragic.

We came at a peak time. The treadmills are filled with all kinds of skinny and athletic. Bulging-muscled men dominate the weight racks. There are, of course, a few geriatrics on the elliptical machines and one middle-aged woman desperately trying to do a pull-up.

I look at my friend. "This is a bad idea," I say.

"Just give it a try," she says. "There's a hot one over there." She points.

I give him a quick scan.

"He's gotta be in college, Gwen. At least try to find me one born in the same decade," I say.

"Okay. How 'bout him?" She points again.

I realize she's being facetious. This one is old.

My options: have a sugar daddy or be a cougar. Or find another buffalo.

"So this is adulthood," I say.

"I think you should have tried something with that cab driver," Gwen says.

"I think we shouldn't try to husband-scout at a gym," I say.

"Just get on a treadmill and try to look cute," she says.

I start walking at a very doable pace.

I can get on a treadmill, but I'm not sure how to look cute on one.

"You'll get more attention if you jog," Gwen whispers, getting on the treadmill to my right.

I don't think Gwen has seen me jog or she wouldn't say that. I increase the speed. This proves to be more challenging than I anticipated.

I distract myself from the pain by putting in my headphones and listening to music. The only songs I have in my phone are some 80s French ballades and some spa music. Neither genre is conducive to cardio.

Gwen reaches over and increases my 4.5 to a 6.0. I offer a glaring look that clearly says, "You are going to kill me."

I start to puff out air in little spurts and sweat drips down my forehead. I'm also ninety-nine percent sure I have back sweat, which is always very sexy. A really macho hottie ascends the treadmill to my left. This gives me a brief boost of false confidence and I increase my speed.

Mistake.

My breathing quickens and I can no longer control my sound effects. My puff-spurts morph into grunt-wheezes, and shooting pains go up and down my shins. I want to decrease my speed, but that's a sign of weakness. I glance helplessly at Gwen. She doesn't see me. One of my ear buds falls out of my ear and I try to put it back in. I accidentally yank the whole headset and my phone falls.

I trip.

I think about the piece of cheesecake on my kitchen counter as I fly off the treadmill. A little stunned, I stand up.

"Oh my God, are you okay?" Gwen shouts at me, jumping off her death machine and coming to my rescue.

Hot dude is still obliviously jogging away next to us. I wonder how in the hell he could have possibly missed the spectacle. That's *focus*.

"I'm fine," I reply. "I think I should give myself a break until tomorrow, though."

"Smart," Gwen says.

She hops back on and I walk out the door, slightly butt-hurt. In both ways.

We come back the next day, but unbeknownst to Gwen, I have an ulterior motive, and it's not to find a man. Slightly inspired by my day of anti-tourism, I decide to perform a social experiment to see if people in a gym react the same way to awkward elevator situations as people on the elevators do. I will ignore all social norms. I will ask strangers strange questions and do unusual things.

I wonder if I can empty a gym of people before it empties me.

Gwen cares too much about what people think, so for my little analysis to work, she needs to be at the opposite end of the gym. I tell her to get started on the stair master and I'll catch up with her after I use the bathroom.

My first target: sorority girl standing in front of the mirror, pony-tailing her hair.

I walk up to the mirror and stand beside her. I begin an improvisational slow dance that largely resembles bad Tai Chi. Step to the left, to the right, back, front, palms pressed firmly together and raised above my head. I remove my right tennis shoe and



sock and touch my toes to the mirror, nodding my head up and down while I do so. I make no eye contact with her whatsoever, but instinctively feel her eyes on me.

In a matter of seconds, she picks up her pink, monogrammed water bottle and cell phone and exits the gym.

*Next.*

There's a middle-aged guy lifting weights a few yards away. He seems like the perfectionist type. I walk over to the rack of neatly positioned dumbbells and pick up the two-pound. I softly meow, and set it on the ground. I then pick up the five pound. I meow a little louder, and place it on the ground next to the two pound. I do this with the ten-pound, the twenty-pound, the twenty-five-pound and the thirty-pound, each time meowing more vociferously.

"What are you doing?" he asks me.

"Meow," I say.

Being very obsessive-compulsive myself, I decide to put the dumbbells back in reverse order, this time with a soft bark in between.

Weight-lifter guy again approaches me and asks me what I'm doing. He seems flustered.

I bark at him.

This makes him uncomfortable. I don't think he's ever been barked at before. He mutters "crazy ass lady," under his breath, racks his weights and walks off.

"I'm too good at this," I say to myself, laughing.

My next recipient is a woman walking on the treadmill while talking on her cell phone. I get on the treadmill next to her, turn it on a low speed and face her, sidestepping.

I don't stare directly at her, because that would be creepy and eye contact is always unnerving, but I look directly above her head and start quietly talking to myself in a made-up language that was on some kids show I used to watch. It's one of those weird languages where you add vowels to the beginning of every consonant in a word.

She tries not to look at me but she can't help it. She caves. I look at her and smile, and then instantly go back into my trance of muttering my special language and staring, trance-like, above her head. She gets off the phone.

"Do you see them?" I ask.

"Excuse me?" she says, hesitantly.

"Them. You see them too, right?"

"See what?" she asks.

"Them," is all I say, looking up towards the ceiling.

She pauses her treadmill and steps off.

I give her some credit. She lasted longer than I thought she would.

My fun is interrupted by Gwen walking up to me.

"Where have you been this whole time?" she asks. "I've been waiting forever."

"Just meeting people," I say.

"Yeah right. You're on a treadmill and there is literally only one other person in this whole gym."

"Yep," I say, grinning.

She rolls her eyes. "I'm gonna go to the bathroom. Don't go anywhere till I get back."

I try to wait for her, but I want to be socially awkward just one more time. The

last remaining person is this guy who's doing pushups over in the corner. I decide to ask him a deep and profound question because most people dodge meaningful questions like the plague. He's standing up by now and his back is turned to me. I walk over and tap him on the shoulder and he turns around.

*Good god.* I gasp a little. He's pretty easy to look at. I wasn't expecting this.

"Can I help you?" he asks politely.

I stare at him, perplexed.

He stares back. He has blue eyes.

"I was conducting a social experiment—," is all I can get out.

"Cool. What kind?"

"I was seeing if I could empty the gym the same way someone would empty an elevator."

"Sounds interesting. Did it work?"

"It worked until you," I say, honestly.

"Ah, see I'm a master at emptying elevators," he says, smiling.

"How do you do it?" I ask.

"I do it a lot of ways. But yesterday, I brought a little fold-out chair, sat down, and commented on peoples' shoes."

"That's good," I say. "What's your name?"

"Daniel."

"Nice to meet you, Daniel."

"Come here often?"

"Not usually. I fell off a treadmill yesterday."

"Well I'd ask you out, but I don't want you to die. Maybe we should try a coffee shop."

"I like coffee," I say. "Or we could find an elevator."

"Huh. That'd be an interesting first date. We can do skits."

Gwen comes back. "Who's this?" she asks.

"The last man in the gym," I say.

## 5. SHE AND THE ONE

I'm getting married. I'm getting married to the last man in the gym. His name is Daniel. I study the rock on my finger just to be sure. I told Daniel when he bought the ring not to buy it, because I'll lose it. It will fall off the sink into the toilet, or our future dog will swallow and choke on it, or maybe it will just fall off my finger when I'm picking out zucchini at the grocery store. He laughed, not because he thinks I'm joking, but because he knows it's true. That's love, when you spend \$12,000 on a ring for a klutz.

We don't want to have a wedding because we don't like people. But our parents would be bummed, so I suggested the non-traditional--a wedding in reverse order. Start with the reception and end with the ceremony. Open bar. Guests will be drunk and happy and going home before the vows are even said, guaranteeing a small audience. Our wedding planner didn't vibe with this idea, so we ditched her.

I look at Daniel and ask him, "What do you think of when you think of a bride?"

"Girl in a big white dress," he says.

"Exactly. I'm gonna wear white overalls instead," I say.

"Can I dress like Charlie Chaplin then?" he asks.

"Yes. But make sure your mustache is real. I don't want it falling off when I smash cake at your face," I say.

"You're going to smash cake at my face?"

"Yes. I've never gotten to smash cake at anyone's face. Humor the bride."

"That's fair," he says.

"Do you know any kids?" I ask him.

"No. Do you?" he says.

"Yes. Do you like kids?"

"Not particularly."

"Me neither," I say. "I would like our ring bearer to be a chicken. We can scatter a trail of chicken feed up the aisle and it can pull the ring in a little cart behind it."

"What if it doesn't follow the trail?" Daniel says.

"Cheap entertainment for the guests," I say. "You know what else? If we're doing the wedding in reverse order, that means that we should be on our honeymoon right now."

"Where would you like to go?" he asks.

"Nowhere," I whisper. "I think we should stay right here."

"What will we do on our honeymoon?"

"Let's each write down something we want to do, and then we'll tell each other," I say.

We grab pieces of paper and start writing.

"Anything we want?" Daniel asks.

"Oh yes. Don't limit yourself," I say.

"Why are we writing it down if it's just one thing?"

"Makes it official," I say.

We finish our lists of one thing.

"Ladies first! Whatcha got?" Daniel says.

"Dress up as college students and crash a frat party."

"Only if we get to pick each other's outfits," he says.

"Deal," I say. "You?"

"Spend an entire day in bed and talk about whatever pops into our heads."

"There we have it," I say. "Honeymoon plans."

The next day is Saturday, and I walk into our bedroom to see an outfit laid out on the bed. Actually, it's a clown costume.

Daniel's in the bathroom changing, so I shout at him, "Don't blame me if I don't look sexy on our honeymoon."

I wonder if I'm about to marry a man with a clown fetish.

"It's okay," he shouts back. "I'll be sexy enough for both of us."

He says this because I'm making him wear a bikini--with a cape--in case it's cold.

I get dressed, and then google "frat parties near me." An astonishing amount of possibilities pop up, so I choose one that intrigues me. There's a slight chance that I'm choosing it because I know my nephew will be there. Seeing his aunt at a frat party in a clown costume might scar him for life, but I'm willing to take that risk.

Daniel walks out of the bathroom in my hot pink bikini and I stifle a laugh that comes out like a snort.

"You ready?" he asks, striking a super hero pose.

"Good god, no," I say. If we show up this early they'll never let us in. We have to wait till midnight when they're all drunk and oblivious."

"Then why the heck did we change so early?" he asks.

"I'm not gonna lie. I wanted to see you in the bikini," I say, grinning.

"You're not quite as exciting to look at," he says, poking at my giant red wig.

"Hey. You picked this," I say. I also secretly rejoice that he must not, in fact, have a clown fetish.

We wait till midnight and make our entrance at the party. It's a two story colonial that's probably owned by some rich kid's dad, and the door is propped wide open by a giant fish statue draped in Hawaiian Leis. Two girls dressed in togas stumble past us through the door, drinks in hand.

"What's the theme of this party?" Daniel asks.

"Dunno," I say.

We walk into the main room--which has been turned into a dance floor—and I realize something: this is a toga party.

"So much for going incognito," Daniel whispers, surveying our costumes.

"At least you have a cape," I whisper back. "I look like a skittles accident."

"Fake it till you make it, baby," he says, squeezing my squeaky nose.

We find the drink station. It's actually a full bar, and there's a bartender.

"Man. In my day we had beer kegs and five-gallon buckets of jungle juice," Daniel says.

The bartender (who is obviously a frat guy) looks us up and down. I intercept before he can ask.

"It's a dare," I say.

"Damn. Sorry bros," he says. "What'll you have?"

"Two gin and tonics and two tequila shots," Daniel says.

"He thinks I'm a dude," I say, laughing.

"You actually look like a cross between orphan Annie and Elton John. In a clown suit."

"Ordered shots, huh?" I say, pointing to the tequila.



"We'll be college students, just for tonight," he says. "Down the hatch!"

We swig 'em down and shove the lemon slices into our mouths the way you do when you're a kid and you want the lemon rind to look like your smile.

We then kiss each other with our lemon-rind smiles.

Daniel sees a dirty glass on the bar, positions himself directly behind it and takes several steps back. He makes a dramatic gesture with his hands to attract some attention, and forcefully spits. The rind projectiles right into the cup.

What a talent.

He receives some applause from a group of students standing nearby, and I motion that I want to try it too.

"You sure, Babe?" he asks.

I nod in affirmation.

I position myself and prepare to spit.

Out sails the rind, although instead of going into the cup, it flies through the air followed by an ample amount of saliva and hits a student on the back of his head.

He turns, slightly inebriated but nonetheless irritated.

It's at this moment I realize that I just spit a lemon rind on my nephew.

"What the hell bruh?" he says, walking towards me.

"So sorry, Wheatie, my aim sucks" I say.

"WHEATIE? (The petite brunette girl standing next to him doubles over in laughter) I thought your name was Weston! Oh my god I'm gonna start calling you Wheatie," she says, giggling.

"Who the hell are you? Only my family calls me that!" He mutters this statement

under his breath.

"Yeah. I'm your aunt."

"I thought you were a dude," he says.

"I've been getting that a lot tonight," I say.

Daniel joins the conversation.

"This is my fiancé," I say, pointing to my bikini-clad man.

This is too much for Wheatie. He just stares at us, stupefied. I'm curious what he's gonna tell my sister.

"Let's leave the boy with some dignity," I whisper in Daniel's ear.

We shuffle out.

"I think we've hit *that* point in our lives," he says.

"What point?"

"The point where we're too old for college parties."

"Agreed."

We get home, change into our PJs and crash into bed. This starts phase two of our honeymoon. I decide to continue our wedding planning conversation from earlier.

"What about our vows?" I ask.

"We should write them."

"I think so too," I say.

He leans over and kisses me on the tip of my nose and lingers there. "You know what I like about you?"

"What?" I say.

"You don't try," he says.

"What do you mean?"

"Everyone these days either tries to blend in with the crowd, or be nothing like anyone. You just exist. You exist like a normally unique human being and you don't even have to try. This is what I love about you."

"You know what I love about you?" I say.

"What?"

"The in-between-ness. All the mundane spaces in between the great big things that we're told are supposed to matter so much. I love you best in the tiny spaces. Like when we throw toilet paper rolls around like a football, or when you let me fall asleep on your arm, or when you fart and blame a frog."

"It's always the frog," he says.

"I think we just wrote our vows," I say.

"I think we did," he says.