

UTAH WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

by

The Women of Utah

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## ACT 1: IDENTITY

### A TINY TOWN OF AUNTS

We were lying on my bed in a house that didn't quite belong in this neighborhood. The room used to be a kitchen, but all of the appliances had been removed to fit in another room. You could still see the outline of where the stove had stood for years, framed by tropical drapes and a couple grease stains. Dani was sprawled across her stomach, swirling a glass of lemonade so that ice chips clinked against the edges. We had been dating for 6 weeks. And she had just come over after work. This morning I had bought her purple bellflowers from the Metro station. And she had brought a tray full of chocolate-covered strawberries, which she knew was my favorite snack. Things between us were still quite unfamiliar but we were desperate to try to understand the context that surrounded each of us. She shifted on the bed, laying her head on my lap and looking at me, she spoke softly,

"Tell me about your people. Your elementary school crush. Your favorite friend. Your first teacher. Mentor figures. Everyone."

I had not thought about these people in so long; they were thousands of miles away, in a world tucked on a small shelf. I lay my head against the wall.

"My favorite teacher was definitely Mrs. Applehands. I mean, come on you can't get a name much better than that."

We chuckled softly. I paused, not really sure how to tell the next part. So I started slowly,

"There was a period of my life where I was completely silent. It started in third grade. At this point, I had been cornered every day for a year in the bathroom by a child who demanded that I do favors for her. Sometimes the requests were to finish homework assignments or bring snacks. Other times I was forced to pull down my pants and let her touch me.

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

I tried to tell several adults but my comments were brushed away. So I just decided to stop talking. I kept to myself, playing at the edge of the playground in a small grove of trees. Some days, I would pick up a stick. My fingers would glide up and down the bark and words would tumble out of my mouth for the first time that day. In these moments, I was just a kid at the edge of the playground, talking to a stick."

Dani's forehead was streaked with concern. I could feel the tension pressing her face. She was silent, her eyes searching my face. So I flipped around so I was facing her directly. I wrapped my fingers around her hands.

"It's okay," I said gently. "You see, I found all of these quirky, chosen aunties who offered me unexpected companionship. They were almost like friends but a little stranger and a little wiser. There was my next-door neighbor, Beth, who needed help pulling weeds in her garden. Somehow each weekend, I found myself in her dirt, sifting my hands through roots and worms and glowing rocks for hours. We developed small rituals of silent tasks. Days were spent organizing and reorganizing sleeves of photographs or turning strawberries in a hot pot of oozing chocolate. Beth never expected me to talk but we found a gentle companionship. She told me stories about her rambunctious students when she was a teacher and the adventures of her own children before they moved away.

Lisa lived further down the street. She started paying me to rake leaves in her yard. After several months of this, she asked that I help her reorganize her basement.

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

The concrete walls were stacked floor to ceiling with boxes of antique toys and racks of moth-eaten clothes. She was shaking slightly as she told me she had never let anyone down here, ashamed of the mess she had acquired. It was on these dust-covered floors that I heard stories of the strangest, most beautiful friendships as we made sculptures out of all of her things.

At sleepovers, I often found myself awake and in the kitchen with the mother of the family. It felt comforting to stand by her side whisking pancake batter or diving my hands in soap suds at 7am while everyone slumbered in the living room. Cheryl (Becky's mother) told me that falling in love is terrifying but being in love is warm and comforting like lying under a stack of warm laundry. Dana (Emma's stepmom) showed me her carefully curated tea collection and told me the international stories that accompanied each flavor. It was at this moment that I discovered my yearning for travel.

Some days, Katrina (Carrie's mom) would sit at the counter with me and tell me deep personal thoughts about her life: the petty drama of the PTA or the way her husband found subtle ways to disappoint her. She would ask me my favorite part of walking to school, why I liked snap peas so much, and what my biggest dreams were for the future. It was in these kitchens that I learned how messy and special life can be."

I could feel myself smiling, caught in this memory. Dani shifted on the bed and added,

"You know this reminds me of my neighbor Joyce. When I came out to my family in high school, my parents just left town for 5 days. They drove up to the mountains to 'think things through.' And I felt completely alone. I had no idea how they were reacting. I was just sitting on my front porch with my head between my knees. Joyce walked up and she called to me and she said 'I'm making lasagna for an event. I could use your help if you're free.' We spent hours together. She let me ramble out my thoughts and when I started to spiral she would put me right to work. We made the best lasagna of my life that day. What was it like for you to come out to your aunties?"

"You know, Dani, it didn't actually go that great. So the men in my life often reacted with indifference. The uncles didn't care to know more, preferring that I simply didn't share stories, details or partners. Most of the time though, they looked at me and passed the potatoes like they always had. But the aunties were different. I was totally surprised by how I lost their companionship. My news sparked visible discomfort and frustration in their faces. They often cut me off or asked that I just stop talking."

I turned back to Dani, leaning my head on her shoulder.

"I haven't talked to any of my aunts in a long time. Beth stopped inviting me over for yard work and Cheryl won't return any of my calls when I'm back in town. They've all become more distant, colder. One day, I would love for you to meet them. We could go on a tour of my hometown.

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

I want to tell each of them that they taught me from a young age to think through problems, to tell stories, and to value relationships. I want them to meet you and see that I found the sort of love, and companionship they always described."

(FADE OUT)

(FADE IN)

## BREAKING THE ICE

I had been afraid of breaking the ice my whole life. Walking out on a frozen lake and seeing the top layer of ice swell with water from below. I had always been afraid of the ice breaking. The deeper and further out you walk on a lake, the thicker the ice. But the more deadly it'd be if the ice were to break. I had always been afraid of breaking the ice. In a surge to break my greatest fear, I had built up the courage to state: "I do love women" to the one woman that I've known all my life. The words had slipped out of my mind, slithered past my teeth in a more serious and detrimental way than ever before. An inevitable spasm of the chest, a hiccup. Those inner shakes where cold pricks fit my arms like sleeves and my chest caves in. I faced my mother, a woman whose face I share. If you were to compare a picture of us both at the age of 5, you'd see no difference. Now I'm 19 and there's no similarity.

"Were you r\*ped?" Ice. "I heard that kids turn gay when they're r\*ped."

This was the only response I had not prepared for. The ice cracked, and I fell through. Surprised that it broke after I stomped and stomped begging it to pull me under, a sign of acknowledgment that my footprints were there. That's why you come out to the lake, right? We touched each other before he ever laid eyes on me and laid me in the backseat of that car. I think about the ways they think they own us. Is that what you think my love for her means? That it cannot be a beautiful romance, but is instead scarred around, inside of me, only a product of what a man has done to me? I am only a reflection of him, and my identity morphed into what he had taken that night.

I know it to be true that my mother's fear about her daughter professing her love for a woman is a narrative and script that's been laid out before us.

My mother will blame it on her traditional Mexican values.  
 And one day I'll ask her where she was while the world was  
 changing around her. But not tonight, because tonight was the  
 night I broke through the ice, and there's no savior, no  
 knight in shining armor to dive in and rescue me. I am alone.  
 The ice will not freeze again this winter. It is irreparable.  
 I float to the surface. The ice has melted, and the first  
 true breath of spring warms me. And now I am warm and dry,  
 there is still a chill that comes every now and again to  
 remind me where I was, below the surface.

(FADE OUT)

(FADE IN)

#### THE ROAD TO SELF-LOVE HAS THORNS

My classmate opens his mouth  
 And out pours words that are made at my expense.  
 They send shivers down my spine  
 And drain all the color from my face  
 But he doesn't notice.  
 Maybe he couldn't hear my pain through my laughter  
 Maybe he thought my laughter was at his "joke"  
 He never thought how I used my laughter to keep me from  
 crying.  
 I save my tears for when I am alone, to lessen the pain in  
 public.  
 It makes more sense for me to laugh, for if tears were shed,  
 he would say:  
 "You are too sensitive!"  
 "Oh come on, are you crying again?"  
 "Oh god, what's wrong now?"  
 "Why can't you just be chill like the other girls?"  
 "God, you're such a—"  
 After too many critiques, I learned to smile through the pain  
 I learned my giggles and laughter were more palatable than my  
 hurt and weeping and screams.  
 But I never stopped being sad  
 I never stopped getting hurt  
 I just stopped telling them my real thoughts.  
 But if I could say what I really thought? I would say:  
 The way you talk to me  
 The words you call me  
 I know are intended to hurt me  
 Intended to put me in a box to control me  
 To remind me of something I'll never forget  
 Who I am in relationship to you  
 Who I am in your eyes  
 But alas, I've learned the way you treat me  
 Is how you treat yourself  
 How you treat yourself when no one is around

The way you talk to me, calling me bitch and sensitive, cute  
 and small.  
 You have not yet learned to love yourself in all its  
 confusing glory  
 And that's okay  
 But you see,  
 I have  
 I have learned how to love myself.  
 So you try to take that away from me, because the love I have  
 created is glorious, contagious, and you want it for yourself  
 But more importantly, you don't want me to have it  
 You don't like that I love myself.  
 That scares you.  
 Well, love, I am nothing this world has ever seen  
 I'm a scary force of nature  
 Because I am not of this world  
 My feet don't touch the ground unless nature has wooed me  
 back to earth  
 Try and prune me, cut me, uproot me,  
 But you cannot kill what I have planted, watered, and grown  
 What I have worked so hard to bloom.  
 No matter how hard you try  
 You cannot make me see myself the way you see yourself.  
 Whoever told you crying was weak  
 Has never felt sore from weeping and wailing.

(FADE OUT)  
 (FADE IN)

#### UNTITLED

Hi. My name is Martina. I identify as part of the female  
 gender and I was originally born a female. I am a Chicana and  
 grew up in a heavily religious Mexican household. Throughout  
 my childhood, I was always held up to a higher expectation  
 than my brother and male cousins who were around my age. This  
 is a typical thing for Chicano households where Chicanos are  
 sought out more and valued more than women and girls. There  
 is a differential treatment that is not limited to Chicano  
 cultures but is common across cultures. In patriarchy there  
 are privileges given to sons rather than daughters. This  
 patriarchy affected my mental health. Being pushed to always  
 succeed and stay within strict boundaries is a toxic  
 environment to be in. Sometimes it was a good thing, when I  
 was able to succeed in school and do well in things. But the  
 stress and anxiety of always having to be the best was  
 exhausting. It was also expected that I care for my younger  
 cousins as well as other family members, alongside my  
 grandmother who helped raise me while my parents worked. I  
 loved helping my grandmother raise my cousins. But the  
 downside was knowing it was expected of me.



I was taught at a young age to help in the kitchen, clean the house, and cater to the men and boys in my family. As time went on, and I grew older, the world changed. My family went through a reset within gendered roles and tasks. I started studying feminist theory and passed on my knowledge to my grandmother and mother. They were aware of the gendered classification that Mexican households have. But activism isn't always the main priority - life gets in the way. And these preconceived ideals hold more power than we realize. I no longer hold unrealistic expectations of myself, especially when my mental health is being affected. Now, I live my life a bit more.

(FADE OUT)  
(FADE IN)

WHAT ARE YOU?

What are you?

My life has been spent being bombarded by people asking questions about my heritage, experience, credentials, skills. I have spent 30 years on this planet having to prove my worth every day due to the color of my skin and my feminine appearance. I grew up introducing myself as, "My father is black, my mother is white." I have described myself as caramel, coffee with cream, even a swirl cone trying to help get everyone the whole picture of what it's like to live between two worlds. Being mixed is something that wasn't very common where I'm from so I grew up being an outcast who found solace in being alone so I wouldn't have to feel the rejection of losing another friend over my heritage.

I am the light that warms your soul while you sleep in the soft green grass.

I am your favorite song at the end of a long, and tiresome day.

I am the cool breeze that brings life to a wind chime.

I am the perfect swirl ice cream cone on a hot summer night.

I spent all my energy, as a teen, trying to fit in and constantly changing my identity. I have fit in every box I have ever been forced in and have learned to adapt on the spot to be accepted. In spite of all the personality I showed, I never let myself love. I didn't think anyone would love someone who didn't know who they were. I was just a vessel for everyone else. I was the sassy, black friend you saw on TV. I was the drama queen on and off the stage. Bolstering, loud gal pal that could party with the boys. I accepted every name and label my friends and family put on me because they knew me best, right?

I am a tight hug who holds you up when nothing makes sense.  
 I am the roar of passion that rings in your ears while your  
 dreams manifest into reality.  
 I am laughter that vibrates every bone.

I came out twice as an adult. I felt supported and  
 comfortable enough to let the world know I am bisexual at 20.  
 It took almost another ten years to come out as nonbinary. I  
 had to fight the constant negative thoughts that if I was  
 true to myself, no one would love me. I feared having too  
 many differences from the norm to be accepted by friends and  
 family. I hid behind descriptors like 'one of the boys' and  
 'tom girl' to hint that I wasn't exactly a woman. I was  
 inspired by peers who were their pure self with such  
 confidence and grace. I wanted to shine as bright as them! I  
 slowly chose outfits and styles that would fit my mood that  
 day rather than my gender. I became an art piece, surprised  
 myself. I gave myself space to experience the mysterious in-  
 between of what society tells us without the shame that I was  
 familiar with. I hoped one day, someone would look at me and  
 be inspired.

I am the roar of the crowd celebrating you.  
 I am the sigh of relief when you find your smile again.  
 I am the future where hope thrives and love is the universal  
 language.  
 I am the dream of my past, the progress of my present, and  
 the hope for my future.

I was taught by society to apologize for my existence. I was  
 shown that difference made you unlovable. But I am now living  
 proof that you can be who you are deep down and that freedom  
 will open all the doors of love and acceptance. I live as an  
 example of telling yourself 'yes' after decades of 'no' and  
 the feeling of relief that overwhelms your very soul. Life  
 wasn't easy for me but I am grateful for the journey, I can  
 love and forgive myself. I can smile through the toughest  
 days and revel in the good. I look forward to the many  
 adventures that await me and I am no longer afraid for the  
 future.

I am a proud biracial, nonbinary, bisexual and will never let  
 my light dull again.

I am me. I have made it this far and now my future is on my  
 terms.

I am you when you choose to be your beautiful self.

I am me. Colorful. Extravagant. Powerful. Me.

(FADE OUT)  
 (FADE IN)

TRANSITION

## CONSENT IS LOVE

Consent is love  
And it's not optional for me anymore.  
I require love and respect  
Not flowers and chocolates  
Consent is all I want.  
No means no  
And simply filling the absence of my no with  
Gifts and praise and sweet nothings  
Does not make me forget that you did not ask.  
They are nothings  
But they aren't sweet  
They are dangerous  
And I can't help but be sad  
When my eyes notice every tear-soaked sleeve  
Every halted breath,  
Every silenced word,  
Every trembling hand reaching for the door.  
I can't help but commiserate with the silent suffering of  
women.  
No means no.

(FADE OUT)

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2: LOSS

(FADE IN)

HI, THIS IS ME!

My first marriage only lasted 6 excruciating months.. Hi. My name is Aimee Ruth Pike. I was groomed for a dissatisfying life. A conservative, religious life. One where women's rights are suppressed, and a temple marriage is the only way to true eternal happiness. This life would mirror my mother's, my grandmother's, and all the women that have come before me.

Formerly known as Aimee Ruth Smith, then Anthony... then back to my maiden name of Smith. That's right! I've been married twice, engaged 3 times and proposed to 4 times. These boys, children if you will. Ultimately undeserving of my love. Got it anyway. I gave it to them. The way my mother had given hers to my father, acting as his humble servant. For a marriage is like a triangle, you see. God at the top and husband and wife as equals. Forever by each other's sides. There's a manual and everything. Except the manual doesn't really explain what to do when your husband comes charging into the bathroom while you're trying to pee. Holding your legs in-between his legs and using his hands to hold your arms fast so that you can't fight back. Whispering with all the rage in the fucking world that you're going to die. No fucking manual told me to shut my eyes tight in defiance. I did that. Me. Aimee Ruth. I don't have a last name in my opinion. I sure as hell don't want to keep my ex-husband's last name of Pike forever and I will fly through space before I take back my father's surname of Smith. It would only continue to serve as a reminder that he is more important than me. That men in general are always going to be faster, stronger, smarter, more capable and stable than I will ever be. Fuck that. I am a woman.

My second husband included this verbiage in our divorce papers, "She should be allowed to return to her last name of Aimee Ruth Smith." He was passing me back. Returning me to my father. I will not be owned. I have decided to break the mold that society tried to place on me. The one designed to make women believe that they need a man in their life in order to be happy. The bible portrays women in displaying ways. Beautiful jewels caught up and saved by a man in some way or another. God himself is depicted as a man. Mary, of course, his ever-doting mother who continues to take care of him well into adulthood. Constantly serving him.

Yes, I had sought my dad's opinion on whether or not I should marry Marshal. My dad and I aren't close.

I had sought his opinion because he was my patriarch, the priesthood man I am supposed to turn to for love and guidance in trying times. He told me to marry him because in his words, "He's really expecting something Aimee, you better not lead the guy on." The truth is, I didn't feel good about marrying him. The first time he messaged me, I remember wanting him to go away, to stop texting me. The first time we met him in person I remember wanting to drive away before he could get in the car. I remember wanting to pack up his suitcase, leave it out on the front porch with a note saying I never wanted to see him again. Instead, I did his laundry, packed his suitcase, said my prayers, and after only 8 months of electronically dating each other, married him... In the LDS temple. My Mother? Sat silent and stressed. Unable to say anything to me about the huge mistake I was about to make. Women are supposed to be there for one another... you know? I think that is the biggest thing that marriage taught me. It took a friend visiting me and boldly expressing her concern for my safety that I was finally able to see the abuse I was going through and decide to leave him. My marriage didn't end when he was pinning me down to the ground screaming that he was going to fucking kill me. His hands covering my nose and mouth in act of suffocation. It ended when I, hands shaking, walked myself into that police station and filed the domestic report of abuse.

I didn't leave my husband merely because I was unsatisfied. Although, I wouldn't blame a woman if she did. I left him because I was suffocating inside of the prison, I allowed him to put me in. That weak ass man actually tried to suffocate me. To snuff me out. I was no longer of use. No longer compliant to his whims. No longer choosing to put my life second to his life. I spent my whole life fighting back against the suffocating home life that was forced upon me only to find that my disobedient willfulness saved my life.

(FADE OUT)  
(FADE IN)

MY NAME IS EVE

My name is Eve. I'm all that is left of her. A dirty, mangy girl. It's so dark. I don't know where I am or how I got here. How did I get here? The air around me burns and swirls with haunting echoes. The road breaks with each step I take. If I stay still too long I will fall with it and burn in the magma below. Why do I keep moving? Why do I fear death? Death would be a release. How I have craved it. To just die and forget. To exist no more.

Carefully I push this broken cart. It holds the most precious parts of my heart. Moments when love interrupted the pain.

My children, feeling their little arms around my neck, and memories of those who loved me. Compelled as if controlled by an unseen force I continue on this road. On either side I see, I feel, I remember everything they did to me. The men, the women. So many years and moments. I hear their voices. I feel their touch. The icy cold, the burning, searing pain. The terror that overtook me. I feel the torture raging through my little body, how they purposely broke my mind into hundreds of fractured pieces. I remember the moment I lost myself forever. I remember what my own hands had to do.

God, why! Just let me die. Please let me go! Still I must push this little cart. I must continue on. All along this wretched road, every fragile moment and memory I held onto falls out. I cannot save anything. Everything, everything I tried to create and cherish, all of my reasons to continue on have burned and are gone as if they never were. Yet those haunting memories and nightmares remain. Stronger than ever. I no longer resemble a girl, or even a human. Most of my flesh and clothing has burned. This journey has taken what was left of me.

A castle looms ahead. It would be beautiful if it weren't so dark. Demons guard the gate. Who would want to enter? All that is in me insists I flee, yet I know that is where I must go. The demon's gaze pierces through me as if I have no form. They seem pleased, triumphant, that I have arrived and let me and my broken cart through. Why am I still laden with this cart? Why did it not burn with everything else and at least relieve me of one burden? The apparitions and haunting memories that lined the road are now magnified and the sounds of terror echo in the halls and through my entire being. It is maddening. The pain, screaming and horrors assault me.

As I enter the room, I see my captor. A darkened remnant of a man, skeleton or flesh, I cannot tell. The stench of death is suffocating. I try to look away, to forget again but I can't. He points to the fountain in the middle of the room. I know I must go but I can no longer move. Full of fury he rushes toward me and grabs me by the throat, forcing me to the fountain. Holding my face over it, he insists that I look. Slowly I open my eyes. To my horror I see in the fountain of blood, not the reflection of a girl but of him! Somehow in all of this, in all of the loss, in all of the lies, in the chaos, in the pain and suffering, I have disappeared and only he remains. I feel as though I am gone. Still holding me in his skeletal hands I am dragged to the cart. A small, delicate box rests inside. I have never seen it before, yet somehow know it belongs to me. It glows like the stars. It is beautiful and interrupts the horrors of this dream. Snarling, he grabs it and insists I open it. I cannot respond. Shaking me and emitting sounds that deafen me, he insists, yet I cannot. In fury he throws me across the room. I land in a heap. It feels as if my all within me is crushed.

Helpless, I watch him try to break it. In madness he slams it against the floor, against the wall, and with his sword yet it will not break. He cannot affect it.

His screams are piercing and I am sure they will shatter the universe, at least the walls of this castle. Frantic, he runs toward me. Pain and fear overcome me and I can no longer stay. As the darkness envelops me I give up the fight. Maybe now God will release me. He will let me die. I wake near a small brook. Everything hurts, everything burns. I see that little box just in front of me. I cry out in pain with the effort to move, reaching for the box. I take it in my hand and pull it towards my chest. He could not break the box. Somehow this little box made of stardust and light, holds the truth. I do not notice the light as it begins to slowly enter my chest. I have begged for the release death would bring. But now, maybe now, holding truth, I dare believe there is more.

(FADE OUT)

(FADE IN)

LLORONA

I don't remember whether Tía Martha called out of habit, or if she called because news travels fast when Latinas are involved. Maybe it was me who called? Or maybe, the call happened because my Tía could sense the loneliness that echoed from the bowl of my body across the distance. I don't remember how it happened. All that I remember is the phone wire coiled around my fingers - and the call.

Only twenty-four years old, I explained the miscarriage to my Tía: what it felt like and how I remember going into the bathroom hoping it would be like any other time. But this time, it wasn't like any other time I used the bathroom. When I stood up, I felt something stuck beneath me. Feeling like every muscle in my body was about to drop from right under me. How I curled my hand and began to reach into myself, only to pull out an orb the size of a fig. How I saw blood I hadn't yet seen since months, flowing out of me, which had flooded the fig. How the fig - the fetus - was shaped like a tear, a pink and purple tear, and it was telling me my body had already started grieving.

I remember I hadn't yet finished telling my Tía about how I put the tear inside a clear container to show the doctors, a grave of what might have been, when she began to repeat, "No, Yedith, no, no." I recall gripping the phone as firmly as I could while my hands trembled along my voice. Tía mourned with me. She repeated in a quiet cry,

"¿Cómo no hice eso, cómo no lo hice como tú, cómo no lo hice?" How did I not do that, how did I not do what you did, how did I not catch them?

"Mi bebé se fue. Perdí a mi bebé. Allí vi en la tasa y el rojo, mi bebé se fue por la tasa, mi bebé. Yy no supe que era mi bebé hasta que se fue!" My baby left, I lost my baby. I saw the toilet and the red, my baby left me through the stream. And I didn't know it was my baby until they left!

Tía and I cried together. I didn't then understand the landline's buzzing sound. And as we said goodbye, nor the quietness that hung in the air. I only thought about how I had held my tear in my hands, holding the promise of hope that had only been like a silent whisper - a flicker that would never light with the world. I held my tear, my baby. And I couldn't imagine myself pressing the lever that would take away my baby the way my poor Tía had. I still hear my Tía's mourning wails through the halls of my bones each time I look at my two children. I hear Tía Martha's crying, and I think of her as la Llorona. She sweeps memories of watching her baby leave; sweeping them into a stream.

Mi bebe se fue, se me fue mi bebe.

(FADE OUT)

(FADE IN)

#### IMPERFECT OPTIONS

So, Kelsey said you were giving her shit for wanting to use a condom -

(HE BEGINS TO INTERRUPT)

Don't start. I know it's true and I also know it's kinda shitty of you. To be fair, you might not realize how big of a deal it is -

(HE INTERRUPTS AGAIN)

Of course, because of pregnancy, and STDs, but -

(ONCE AGAIN, HE

INTERRUPTS)

Okay. Listen. When I first lost my virginity, it was more of an inevitable-guess-that's-what's-happening-tonight-kind-a thing than it was a pivotal life moment. You know? It's just what you do when you're tired of giving head.



Everything I knew about birth control I learned from Planned Parenthood's website, and at the time, I thought the only factor in choosing birth control was how well it kept you from getting pregnant. I got on the pill, and it was fine for a couple of months... but then my hormones went completely out of whack. I was crazy, like swinging from ecstatic, to distraught, to furious over the littlest shit for fuck-know's what reason. Sex was painful. My periods were so irregular I bled from July straight through to September. But I went to the doctor and was told that everything was normal... the pill causes irregular bleeding... and mood swings... and weight gain... and acne. But yay, everything's fine. Luckily, your girlfriend's not the only one with a friend who will, occasionally-when-necessary overstep her boundaries. My friend confiscated the pills and made me promise to go to Planned Parenthood. I did and ended up with a copper IUD: safe, effective, non-hormonal. Right? I cried when they put it in, but I figured it hurt less than childbirth. And it was great until I got my first period.

I went to the Grand Canyon and the only thing I remember from it is swirling black dots and a shit ton of pain. Sex was still painful - not slightly less pleasurable, but painful... and scary. I struggled to relax knowing that a piece of metal could get jolted from my cervix by an over-excited thrust and perforate my uterus. But I didn't think I had the right to complain. I wasn't pregnant, so I thought the birth control was doing what it was supposed to do, I guess. And that's just how it was... until I went a month without getting my period. I took a pregnancy test, but it was negative. But was it too early? I took another one. Still negative. But was I too hydrated? Another. Negative again. But was it a bad test?

Meanwhile, in the news "Roe v. Wade. Will it be overturned?" I never thought I'd care, you know? Abortion laws would never affect someone as careful as me... I was making all these sacrifices to be safe... to be smart. Finally, I got my period. The relief was overwhelming. Then a few nights later, I was in the bedroom when I felt something uncomfortable. I went to the doctor. My IUD had fallen out, tearing my cervix and causing an infection. I had to take Plan B and use condoms for two weeks. The Plan B made me sick. I was dizzy, light-headed, utterly nauseous and had a headache. I told Jamie, hoping he'd help or at least thank me for what I was putting my body through for him. He just said, "It's not supposed to do that." Apparently, his ex had better luck than me. I told him we needed to use condoms for a couple of weeks. He didn't complain, but still the condom didn't always make it on. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't just his fault, but I was tired of always being the responsible one. And he offered vasectomy; he even offered to hold off having sex until we were married. But I knew those weren't real options. I needed to get the IUD put back in, so I lied to the doctors.

"No unprotected sex for the last  
two weeks?" "No."

The chance I was pregnant was so small... but the next three days... I... bled... I don't know... No woman should have to put up with all of that, but with such limited options for birth control, many do. If you could give Kelsey another option... if you could make it so she didn't have to deal with hormones destroying her body or the pain and paranoia... You need to realize it's just as much your responsibility as it is Kelsey's. And then you need to realize that fulfilling that responsibility doesn't make you a hero, or a goddamn sexual martyr. It makes you an adult who succeeded in doing the bare minimum.

(FADE OUT)  
(FADE IN))

I GIG, YOU GIG

My car's name is Midas,  
But I call him Mighty.  
We are mighty.  
While scrolling through Instagram a pink pop-up-ad informed  
me  
With twenty-five hours and a car  
I could earn a decent weekly living.  
Driving ride-share provided me a level of flexibility.  
It took me six months, but I found my rhythm.  
Mighty became a tidy little cubicle.  
I served water, gum, snacks, and smooth rides.  
The atmosphere of the ride was up to my rider,  
Wherein they could sit in silence, engage in idle chit-chat,  
or meaningful discussion.  
I wanted our shared space to be a safe space,  
Where listening and advice flowed in both directions.  
I picked Smith up at the 7-Eleven.  
His ride had two stops.  
He was on break,  
Headed to his apartment,  
Then back to the 7-Eleven.  
We chatted easily.  
I am a student,  
He is a server.  
I have a partner,  
He has a partner.  
He doesn't have any pets,  
But he wants a dog.  
I have three cats;  
I swear they are plotting my death.

We laugh.  
 COVID-19 has been life-altering,  
 But we both have work.  
 People still need food and rides.  
 We both work seven days a week.  
 And so it went,  
 Smith asks me to drop him off at the restaurant across the  
 street  
 Close to the 7-Eleven.  
 It is where he works.  
 He has made a habit of placing his pick-up pin at the 7-  
 Eleven,  
 Because it's easier for drivers to find.  
 I tell him it is my favorite place in the area to order  
 Indian food.  
 Pulling up, I place the car in park.  
 Smith lingers for a moment.  
 He wants to ask one last question.  
 Shoot.  
 He leans toward me and asks if I think brown skin is  
 attractive.  
 Yes, of course;  
 I am brown.  
 He smiles and leans in further.  
 He asks me for a kiss.  
 I am dumbfounded,  
 NO.  
 Where is this coming from?  
 Didn't we just talk about our lives?  
 Our significant others?  
 I have a girlfriend,  
 I told him that.  
 Still, Smith presses,  
 Reaching for my hand,  
 Promising  
 This kiss is between us.  
 No one will know.  
 NO!  
 I WILL KNOW! I WILL KNOW!  
 Still, he persists,  
 Telling me how he notices me when I visit his restaurant.  
 I am beautiful,  
 My body is beautiful.  
 Please, it is just a kiss.  
 I have retreated,  
 My back is against the driver window.  
 NO!  
 I DON'T WANT TO KISS YOU!  
 THIS IS WRONG!  
 Please get out of my car.  
 This is inappropriate.  
 Smith leaves.  
 I am shaking.  
 I sit for a while.

What did I do wrong?  
 My app prompts me to finish the ride.  
 I give Smith a 5-star rating,  
 He doesn't even deserve 1  
 But if I rate him poorly  
 He can see it.  
 He might retaliate.  
 I have worked hard for my rating.  
 Internalized misconceptions of harassment race through my  
 mind:  
 Is it because of the way I dress?  
 My mind is trying to connect the dots.  
 Smith said he noticed me when I visited his restaurant.  
 He watched me.  
 Did he select me as his driver because he recognized me?  
 I need to go home,  
 Nothing feels safe.  
 I carry this with me for days,  
 Weeks,  
 Months,  
 A year.  
 I told Audrey what happened.  
 She is furious.  
 She wants to know if I reported Smith.  
 No.  
 She wants to know if I called the restaurant to report his  
 behavior.  
 No. I don't want to get him in trouble.  
 What if he is fired?  
 Didn't he make a mistake?  
 Audrey says Smith's behavior is not a mistake,  
 It is sexual harassment,  
 I need to report him.  
 She does not want Smith to do this to someone else.  
 I tell her I need a day or two to think about it,  
 We all make mistakes.  
 I do not report him.  
 I deny his behavior.  
 Did I just make Smith someone else's problem?  
 This has happened to me before,  
 I did not report them either.  
 WHY?  
 Because he didn't touch me.  
 Am I rating this experience in physical harm?  
 Have I rated them all as such?  
 Audrey says I'm conditioned.  
 So, how do I break the cycle?

(FADE OUT)  
 (FADE IN)

I AM STRONG

I am strong  
People will scream and threaten and yell  
But I  
Using only my words  
Make others tremble.  
With the power of my softness they listen, afraid to cross me  
All because using only my words  
I make others know my worth.  
My value is not weighed against your fear of me  
I will never scream back to make you listen to me.  
People always told me they hated my voice  
As I got older I realize it wasn't my voice they hated rather  
they hated the words I had to say.  
I don't care if you hear me  
But I will never stop speaking.  
I am strong.

(FADE OUT)

END OF ACT 2

TRANSITION

ACT 3: RESILIENCE

(FADE IN)

## A HATRED OF CLOVER

There was a park on the same block as my childhood home, nestled between a white, suburban street and a white, suburban cul-de-sac. Here, I made stupendous chains of clover flowers. You know the type: tiny, shapeless, white; relevant to adults only in their correlation to bee stings. They grew in abundance in my neighborhood: at the park, in the patchy yard of my elementary school, and on the soccer field, where my parents discovered, to their disappointment, my incompetence and disinterest in the little league.

I was a champion flower-tier. My family had three daughters, as did the family two doors down. Among the six of us, I made bracelets and crowns for everyone, and once even a jump rope because my nimble fingers could connect even the shortest of stems without snapping them. The other girls became flower-gatherers, or - in my mind - subservient crown-makers. Our combined efforts transformed us daily into six bedecked flower princesses, complete with braided hair and dirty, bare feet.

On the day of my high school graduation, it was grey where the skies threatened rain for hours before eventually opening up, allowing an outdoor ceremony. My classmates and I zipped ourselves in the same black puffy jacket, donning our blue robes over them and appearing, for the moment, a bizarre parade of literate Teletubbies, marching two by two past a crowd of wind-battered faculty, familia, and abuelos. I didn't want to go. Ceremonies, I declared high-mindedly, are pointless. The ceremony was interminably tedious and occurred in a minefield of self-doubt, toxic double standards, and, worst of all, other people. My best friend, through a combination of begging and inducing guilt, convinced me to go. It was sentimental for her. As we queued up for the ceremony, someone had to run to their car. Eager for an excuse to evacuate the soggy gymnasium, I tagged along. As I reached the parking lot, ridden with cracks and littered with cigarette butts and bits of mylar balloons, I noticed the tufts of grass growing up the base of the chain link fence that separated the lot from the stadium lined with dozens of tiny white flowers - the ones I had loved as a child, optimistically poking their heads into the grayness of the day. I felt, for the first time, a little sentimental. I picked a few and wove them into my braids. My long and thick hair held the flowers easily with all of its ornery Hispanic might.

I hustled back into the gymnasium to meet my best friend.

"You look pretty," she said.

Five hours later, I was merrily ingesting drugs and alcohol at the drug-and-alcohol-free party. I sat at a table with Jack, a transfer from Kansas City, whom everyone referred to as "Jack from Kansas City" and never just "Jack." Jack from Kansas City had striking features. He was impressively articulate and unquestionably gay, qualities which I envied, as I was blushing inarticulate and my gayness was still quite questionable. Jack handed me a pill and I swallowed it. It was blue. The memory of that night is filled with vague recollections of intoxication. The glaring lights of the venue; the tongue-numbing thirst induced by grocery store cupcakes; too much small talk. The towering warmth of a blurry-edged seraph; a stable-legged counterpoint to my increasingly noodle-like form; and the swelling curve of a prodigious tricep. I noticed the slightly increased thickness of the cotton under my hands, a man's t-shirt. A chest wide enough to intercept a stumble, cloaked in the cloying odor of vaporized nicotine. These are the beings we allow to pass for men. It was in the bed of this creature that I woke up at half-past noon the next day.

Months later, as I walked on a chilly autumn sidewalk, and the sight of an elementary school playground made me feel like I was hit by a bucket of ice water. Standing frozen to the concrete, tears choked their way up my throat. An unwillingly memory took hold and it was this: Three days after graduation, I returned to his bedroom. I returned and saw that the flowers I had woven into my hair were laying on the bedside table, lined up side by side, like a row of tiny white corpses.

(FADE OUT)  
(FADE IN)

#### THE SPIDER

As I climbed into the passenger seat of the silver Honda, I let out a sob.

"Why are you crying?" my father asked. "Do you not want to be here or something?"

He continued to berate me with questions as we drove through the familiar streets of my hometown.

While passing the music store where I bought piano books for the first time, he uttered, "your mother has turned you against me." There was an unbearable sadness that rushed over me when I was told we were going to Arizona. I have never been good with change, and this new information raised my anxiety through the roof. It did the same for my younger siblings. My father, my siblings, and I left Provo late at night. There is something eerie about Provo in the middle of the night. The streets were empty, the only light coming from the streetlights that lined the main road to the freeway. As we drove through my hometown, my mind wandered, where my thoughts encompassed multiple images: my friends who thought every building in this area was haunted; my best friend who only shopped at the music store in downtown Provo where she claimed that their voice lessons were one of a kind.

"Well, this is MY time!" my father yelled at us. "You should be excited to spend time with me."

I felt terrified every time we climbed into the silver Honda. My heart would beat as though I was sprinting for miles and miles. After the first time my dad exploded in the car, we all quickly learned when to stop talking. My brother was seven when my dad told him he had to walk home. He had been crying about not being able to play with one of his friends.

"You are an ungrateful little bitch!" My father had screamed at him from the front seat. "I'm not going to drive you home if you treat me this way."

And with that, the silver Honda jerked to a stop, pulling over. My brother was yanked out of his booster seat, tears flying down his face. He screamed my name helplessly and hung onto my arms. My stomach dropped. My father was bigger than him, by a lot. And stronger. Stronger than my three siblings and me put together. My younger sister rushed out of the car and started hitting our father as hard as she could.

"If you make him walk home, I AM GOING WITH HIM!" she screamed.

With that memory clear in my mind, I shot my brother an annoyed look when he mentioned that he would be missing his soccer camp during the drive to Arizona. I was annoyed too, but I didn't want anyone to be kicked out of the car again. I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw that my siblings had fallen asleep. The silver Honda only had five seats so my siblings squeezed into the backseat.



My father, sitting in the driver's seat was still trying to talk to me, even though I was clearly not listening to him.

"Why are your siblings acting like brats?" My father asked me at least twice before I registered that he was talking to me.

"I think they are just disappointed that they had to miss their sports camps," I responded as diplomatically as I could.

"Well, it's not my fault that they had to miss them, that's your mom's fault." He falsely stated, resentment of a year's divorce coming through in his voice.

I grimaced as we drove past all the abandoned buildings, my anxiety worsened, becoming increasingly uncomfortable as we drove past the different colored buildings. My heart hurt. I just wanted to be back in my room reading a book on my blue swivel chair. I wanted my mom. I was both excited and anxious as we drove through the red rocks. Both of my biological parents were from Arizona, so all of my grandparents live there. We had been driving to Arizona long before my parents ended their marriage. I really enjoyed being able to go visit them, feeling the warmth they had for us kids. The smell of my grandmother's house, especially when she cooks, wafts throughout the cul-de-sac. It's a very warm smell. It smells like home. We drove through rocks and hills that were slowly changing from green to the light red that is been familiar to me since I was little. But despite the excitement that I felt to see my grandparents, I had a sinking feeling in my stomach. I kept looking over at the person in the driver's seat. This was someone that I felt that I should have known. Someone that I should have felt bonded too, the same way that I feel bonded to my mom. I immediately started feeling guilt that was all too familiar. My friends all had good relationships with their fathers. Why couldn't I have one? I remember asking one of my best friends in seventh grade if she ever hated her dad.

She reacted with disgust telling me, "Oh my god, no, my dad is great. I can go to him with anything."

My heart dropped when I heard her say that, hoping that I could find similarities in our experiences. But I was the one with divorced parents. I started listening to music on my phone. I had been playing piano for over six years and was constantly trying to improve. There was a mixture of worry and determination that I had every time that I thought of the black and white keys where I spent hours learning the correct way to play. MacDowell's "Alla Tarantella" began as I readjusted in my seat. Dum dum da da, dum dum, dum dum, da du dum dum dum da da, I hummed to myself. The spider moved.

Suddenly, I was jerked to the left of the car. My father snapped his head up suddenly. He had fallen asleep, despite his insistence two hours earlier that we had to leave. My heart skipped a beat as I glared at him.

"Why are you giving me that look?"  
he snapped at me.

"Dad, we need to stop for the  
night. You are going to fall  
asleep," I said.

He rolled his eyes at me, but reluctantly agreed. I couldn't believe that he actually took my advice. I always felt a little older, but I'm 12. And I don't think that a 12-year-old should be responsible for keeping someone awake on a long drive. Du dum du dum du dum, McDowell's Tarantella played in my ears. The spider was moving back and forth. We went to a hotel that I spotted about two miles behind us. There was no other way to describe this other than: this hotel was in the middle of nowhere. The terrain was bland, with yellow and green bushes dotting the horizon. But there is a certain kind of dirt you can only find in Southern Utah. The dirt is speckled with red. And the red dirt continues as you move farther and farther south. This hotel was the only place for miles. At 2AM, as we pulled up to the hotel, I saw that it was covered with thousands of small grasshoppers. The hotel was the size of a Best Western. Fairly big. But it was still covered in thousands of grasshoppers. I've had a fear of grasshoppers since I was small. Something about them jumping around, you can't predict their movements. And that is terrifying. It was two in the morning. I started praying internally that this hotel wasn't closed. Otherwise, we would have to sleep in the car, and my father's erratic behavior was getting more and more erratic by the minute. He stared off with a dazed look as soon as he parked the car. I felt my heart race even faster. I couldn't explain why he was acting so weird. He would sometimes get weird moods and not want to talk to anyone, or just pull over to the side of the road and stay there for an hour and stare out of the window.

I grabbed my dad's wallet and jumped out of the car, internally screaming about the number of grasshoppers that were jumping all over me. I still had my headphones in at this point, the spider repeating its dance on the piano. I threw my phone and headphones into the pocket of my sweats as I entered the lobby. A twelve-year-old should not be able to make a hotel reservation, but I must've looked so desperate to the night concierge that she allowed me to book a room for the night.

Then I ran back to our silver Honda, repeating in my head, "there's no grasshoppers out here, there's no grasshoppers out here." By this time, my siblings had already gotten out of the car with our things. My father reluctantly followed them, and asked me how much the room had cost. I didn't answer him, just took my brother by the hand and led him into the bleak hotel. I hated this. I just wanted to sleep in my own bed, and not have to deal with acting as a parent to three younger children. Especially when I knew that we did have parents. We walked down the long hallways with brown walls and the green carpet. My sister slowly fumbled with the key and I grabbed it from her, mumbling something about how "I just have to do everything around here." I took one step into the green carpeted room. There were grasshoppers covering the entire carpet. I screamed, and felt close to passing out. "I'll sleep in the car!"

(FADE OUT)  
(FADE IN)

#### FAVORITE JEW

My high school English teacher had us write affirmations to everyone in the class as a send-off into the summer. One classmate wrote that I was her "favorite Jew." Even though she meant it as a compliment, being someone's favorite Jew is, first of all, kind of an odd compliment and second of all, isn't that hard in Iowa City. There were three other kids in my b'nai mitzvah class. Ten Jews in my high school of 1,200. Yeah, thanks, I'm glad I'm your favorite, but who was I really competing against for the title? It didn't feel like much of an affirmation, but I laughed and thanked her anyway. Jessica, the classmate who had dubbed me her favorite Jew, was a biracial ex-Mormon mock trial lawyer. It was safe to say she knew a thing or two about living in a marginalized identity, even more so than I did, so I tried not to take her "affirmation" too seriously. But I always wondered what she meant by it. My bat mitzvah, my inauguration into Jewish adulthood at age 12, did not feature a huge crowd, an expensive dress, or a cupcake-themed afterparty. My mother was firm in her belief that my bat mitzvah should not be about anything but the service. And the baked potato bar.

That part was my idea. For all our meticulous planning, there was one detail of the day that I didn't see coming. One of the Shabbat regulars, a woman who always made sure to give me a heads-up when she would be bringing chocolate cake to the oneg, stepped onto the bema. She gifted me a gold Star of David necklace along with a black and white photograph of the woman to whom it had originally belonged, a young Jewish woman in Europe during WWII. Even without knowing the history behind the necklace, it was a clear signal of the wearer's Jewish identity and an indicator of their pride. I was excited at the prospect of letting the world know who I was without having to actually tell them first. My mother, not so much. Raised by two immigrant Holocaust survivors, one of whom pretended to be Catholic to survive the war, my mother was wary of me expressing my identity so publicly. I have never worn the Star of David necklace. It seems a small price to pay for dodging potential danger, but it still makes me sad sometimes. I don't remember learning that my necklace, my ethnicity, could attract unwanted attention but I have always known, just as I have always known that men see me wearing short shorts or a romper as an invitation to engage. I count myself lucky that I don't have to tell anyone I'm Jewish if I don't feel safe. My Black and Indigenous siblings do not have this luxury of getting to reveal their identities where and when they so choose. Even if I encounter a white supremacist, a real-life certified Klan member, they would likely see me as one of their own. I can slip under the radar of hate, though I know if I reveal my identity to them, their opinion will quickly shift. This is why finding a Jewish community in college felt like such a big priority to me. I wanted a community of women my age who understood my experiences and celebrated my holidays. A community where I could just be myself without hiding or slipping under the radar. Hillel, the Jewish student organization on campus, hosts everything from Shabbatons to seders for Utah's Jewish student population. I say Utah and not the University of Utah because it is the only Hillel in the state. At the very first event, as an overly-confident freshman, I was quickly put in my place. The other women were nice but in a sticky sweet kind of way, not in a way that makes you feel genuinely included. These Californian sorority women specialized in this type of surface-level inclusion and friendliness. At one point in my second year, I sat around a table with four of these women, at a Fellowship meeting. One of them, tugging on a lock of bleached blonde hair, nonchalantly revealed that being fake nice and making other women think she is their friend is how she has attained the level of success in Greek life and internships that she has enjoyed. The other women lauded her for her bravery in sharing. I felt sick. This was not the community I had hoped for.

Don't get me wrong: I don't have a problem with bleach blonde hair, shiny Instagrams, or women from California.

It's just that I am a frugal Jewish woman, one who exclusively buys Kroger and Private Selection, one who patches up her clothes when they tear. These are the girls my parents wanted me to stay away from so badly that they barred me from attending Jewish summer camp, as that is where the JAPs (Jewish American Princesses) congregated. I have to admit that I'm jealous. I have never tasted the community and luxury of camp as they have. As a Jewish college student, I am left out of the club, literally and figuratively. Even in the Jew Club on campus, being a Jew is lonely. I don't think I'm anyone's favorite anymore. As a white Jewish woman, I don't always know what space is mine and what isn't. In Hillel, I don't know if I am "Jewish enough." When I am notified of an artistic opportunity to honor women of marginalized identities, I ask myself, is that me? Am I marginalized enough to count? Truth be told, I still don't know the answer. Funnily enough though, my gender, rather than exacerbating my experiences with marginalization, actually seemed to protect me. While my brother was told "Jew jokes" at wrestling camps and called a "dirty Jew" at football games, I sailed by, unnoticed. Was it the rough-and-tumble wrestling culture that made my 9-year-old brother more susceptible to Jew jokes than me? Was it toxic masculinity that encouraged anti-semitic name-calling among his friends and not mine? Was it sheer awkwardness that made his freshman-year girlfriend's father joke about the "hole in the sheet?" I'll never really know. In the shadow of the emergence of the acronym BIPOC and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, what does the story of a white Jewish woman matter? I teeter between privilege and marginalization - getting out of a speeding ticket by feigning the girlish innocence only afforded to white women in one breath and saying hello to the police officers who guard my synagogue in another. How can I say I stand for human rights, someone asks, when I think the State of Israel should exist? How do I call out antisemitism while checking my privilege? What is my place in all this?

I still wonder what made Jessica pick me as her "favorite Jew." I want to imagine it was an inside joke, a joke made by someone who knows what it's like to be treated differently because of her identity, but at the same time, I know I can easily hide behind the invisibility of whiteness. Jessica, not so much. I thank God I am able to choose whether to put up a mezuzah in my apartment building or not, whether I want to clarify that I work at the synagogue's religious school or just let them think I'm Christian. The instinct to not tell the whole truth, to not disclose my identity to just anyone, is a privilege borne out of marginalization and oppression. I toe the line between two worlds, hopeful that one day I, and my Black and Indigenous siblings, will be able to live as our full selves in any context without fear or trepidation.

(FADE OUT)  
(FADE IN)

RAGE

Survival (avoidance and fear), moved to rage (acknowledgement and seeing the truth of what is), returns me to centeredness.  
I write:

Fires out.  
But the embers  
Still glow.

I don't know  
Which way  
This will go.

The fire  
Has consumed  
All that I had to give.

I am now left tired.  
No energy.  
A vague sense  
of dread.

Rage is an alright emotion,  
But it tires  
Out too quickly.

I am left empty.  
What else instead?

Eyes wide open  
That things will  
Continue to go this way.

Until we are  
Truly able to say to each other:

"You are my  
Brothers and Sisters.  
I would never treat you this way."

You can have  
Your likes and dislikes,  
Your good days and bad.

But please  
STOP KILLING

Because you are mad.

Instead turn that rage  
Towards the hurt that you carry,  
To a culture that also says  
"You are not good enough for any..."

There within you is where to begin  
To learn to grow love, accepting yourself  
As then each other, as family and kin.

(FADE OUT)

(FADE IN)

#### WONDERS OF MYSELF

I go to look in the mirror. I feel so magical, fierce, dangerous, powerful. A glorious force of energy that blinds any negativity in its path. But then my eyes tell me I am ugly and nothing to be proud of; I flinch at the sight of myself.

Why?

Sometimes I feel exactly that: Ugly, worthless, unhealthy, weak, acne and scars reminding me of how much I loathe myself. But then my eyes tell me I'm pretty. So pretty.

Why?

I wish my feelings were stronger than my eyes. And I wish they would coincide. They are so often at war that it begs the question – What are they fighting for? My self-worth or my demise?

As a child I was never concerned with being pretty. I wanted to be strong. Smart. A winner. Powerful. Loved. Respected. Witty. Admired. Intelligent.

But those traits were not available for me. No. They were meant for the men of this world. The boys. The heroes. But not me.

Why?

Because I was raised with the misinterpretation that no matter what I did, I could never be any of those things because I was a girl. My attempt to fight this was to spend my days trying to be better than boys. And even though I felt like I was stronger and faster, and smarter and better, I could never be any of those things because I was a girl. And after years and years of not being good enough, being judged, being harassed, being belittled, I assumed being a girl was the thing holding me back from being what I felt like on the inside...

So I traded in my femininity for the approval of men.

And in the end lost any remnants of my real self.

No matter what I did, I could never escape being a woman.

I was just a girl with a pretty face, long hair, a skinny body, cute and contained. I could never be anything I wanted to be because I was a girl.

But this body,  
This face,  
This label,  
This rule book that comes with the way the world sees me is  
not what I signed up for.  
I've used my hair as a shield from the world. My makeup as my  
armor and my body as my sword. And it didn't matter if I ate  
or slept or drank water. But if my hair and eyelashes were  
curled I could make it through my day without any scrutiny or  
shame.  
Why?  
I am more than the way I look. I want to create my life by  
not abiding by the world's set of expectations of how to be a  
woman. Because I will not be damned for a bad hair day or  
baggy eyes. When I finally embraced my femininity, that was a  
whole new world of beauty I had never known.  
There is more to life than being pretty.  
There is more to being a woman than that.  
And I want to know what that means for me.  
Life is so full of wonders, why can't I be one of them?

(FADE OUT)

END OF ACT 3



CREDITS

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For the women that are often unseen and the stories that are often untold.

Gender is complex. 'Woman' is defined to include transgender women, nonbinary folks, and gender-nonconforming folks - for anyone who has experienced womanhood in mind, body, spirit, in the past, future, or present.