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## Technicalities: a Memoir

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Technicalities

A Memoir

by

Shelley Smith

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in

University Honors

and

Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Thesis Adviser

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## Artist Statement

Using creative non-fiction memoir, this piece explores the social location of the author throughout her life. By examining memory, writing from different tenses and providing creative observations and commentary on experience, the author is able to offer perspective on various aspects of privilege, oppression and the intersections therein. This memoir addresses her human development as impacted by social systems and constructs such as, public educational institutions, church, sexism, classism, and white supremacy. The creative style also attempts to validate and legitimize personal experience as research in a deconstructed, approachable manner to increase public interest and awareness of personal social location.

### **Purpose:**

Often there is a disconnection of quantitative data from qualitative experience in sociological research. While statistics can be interpreted a number of ways, personal experience is the truth as the person knows it. In creating this memoir, I will provide the reader with experiences to which they can relate, or to which they can be shown how they may have experienced an aspect of privilege. The primary focus of this memoir will be from a perspective of my experience as a woman and the intersections with class status, whiteness, ability and other social constructs. Therefore, multiple social constructs will be addressed throughout the memoir, as well as in the individual essays.

Memoir typically explores the experiences of the author in the first person and draws on emotion. In this Creative Thesis Memoir, I will explore my experiences as they relate specifically to issues of privilege and oppression and the effects of those experiences on my emotional psyche, success and failure and how these issues have created and influence the person I am and how I navigate my world.

The memoir consists of a selection of essays, some of which will stand alone, and others will be connected to each other. Using a conversational tone and style in first person past-tense, I will analyze my explore gender oppression, class oppression and privilege, and multiple other facets of privilege and oppression.

### **Background and Significance:**

In my early experiences studying issues of privilege and oppression, I found it easy to be the “Devil’s Advocate” when reading research articles as well as personal essays. I believed the United States was close to being post-racial, in that I understood racism to be interpersonal prejudice rather than systemic and institutionalized. Racist people were ignorant, and People of Color should not let such idiocy affect them. I had some understand the systemic issues around gender and class.

Working with The Illumination Project at Portland Community College during the 2011-2013 academic years changed my frame of mind around issues of race, and gave me a deeper understanding of how systemic and institutionalized oppression works in this country. The Illumination Project is a social justice theater program in which the participants create plays based on their experiences. When I heard directly from my fellow Student Educators the stories of racism, classism, ableism, sexism and many other –isms, I could not argue with their experiences.

As I furthered my studies in the Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies Department at Portland State University, I was familiarized with the memoir genre in various classes, and saw how memoir could be used as activism. Author bell hooks used memoir to illustrate the effects of oppression using a variety of tenses and perspectives. Describing her experiences growing up black, girl/woman in a working class family in the south, it cannot be argued she experienced

sexism, racism and classism both in the world and within her family. Maxine Hong Kingston uses bio-mythology to relay her experiences as a first-generation Chinese-American woman trying to assimilate to American culture as well as honor her Chinese culture and traditions. Anne Lamott uses humor to describe her experiences with gender, as well as tell of her class and white privilege, usually using a first-person narrative.

For some readers, it may be easy to dismiss this memoir as a misinterpretation of the experience. I hope to create an environment in these pages in which the reader can sympathize and/or empathize to better understand the effects of navigating this world as “other” and/or “the ideal” or “default” identity.

### **Methods and Procedures:**

Influenced by the above authors as well as my collegiate studies of Women, Gender and sexuality, I will write from my personal experiences in terms of gender, race, class, ability and other social constructs. Being a 41-year-old white able-bodied woman from a working class background gives me a great deal of life experience from which to draw. However, it is complicated in issues of class due to my mother being raised in an upper-middle class background. Ability is also complicated in that I have struggled with depression and anxiety while still being able-bodied.

These social constructs dictate all aspects of my life in some way. Exploring these through personal memoir will shed light on how they affected my childhood, how my childhood influenced my adulthood, and how navigating the world carrying these identities continues to influence, and will continue to influence my career, relationships, access to resources, and overall social experience.

## Trophy

The hot sun was baking me and Mom while we waited in line with the other kids and their parents. It was Little League try-outs. Everybody made a team. If the check cleared. At the time, I was not so sure.

The eight-foot tables were lined up in a long row with grown-ups taking paperwork and checks, assigning numbers and explaining the process. *First there is batting, then catching and fielding. Once you're done here, get in that line there. Have fun and good luck! Next!*

I was getting anxious.

“What if they make me play softball?”

Mom looked down at me and said sternly, “You tell them you want to play baseball.”

“But I’m a girl. What if they don’t let me? I don’t want to play softball, Mom! I want to play baseball! You tell them.”

She lowered herself to my nine-year-old level, looked me in the eye and said “*You* will tell them you want to play baseball.”

“Next! Hi! What’s your name?” The Lady began filling out my paperwork. Address, parents (*It’s just my mom*), phone number. “Okay, head over there and wait in line for batting try-outs.”

I looked to my right. That was softball. Baseball was in the field to my left. I looked at Mom. She nodded at me.

“I want to play baseball.”

Pause. “Um, ok. Let me get a different form.”

I beamed up at my mom as The Lady copied my information from the softball to the baseball form.

“Alright then, get in *that* line over *there*. Good luck! Next!”

I lined up with the other kids. Boys. All of them. I waited my turn while they looked at me funny.

“Next! Oh! Softball is over there, sweetie,” The Man said.

“I want to play baseball,” I said quietly and defiantly.

“Oh. Okay!” The man handed me a bat and a helmet. “You’ll get twenty pitches from the machine. They’re tennis balls, so they won’t hurt,” The Man soothed. I hadn’t heard him say that to any of the kids in front of me.

When I was done, I handed over the bat and helmet.

“Good job! Head over to catching and fielding. Next!”

A grown-up tossed some balls to me. Some grounders, some pop-flies. I didn’t do so great. I was discouraged.

“I’m not gonna make a team. I didn’t catch very many,” I complained to Mom.

“You hit more than any of the boys!”

Seventeen out of the twenty. She counted.

I beamed.

A few days later I got my team assignment, practice schedule and game dates.

First practice was a repeat of try-outs. Some basic skill-building. Catching and fielding. Batting. I was the only girl on my team. Some of the boys had played T-ball before. I wasn’t very good compared to them. But I hustled and listened to Coach. I was eager to please and

prove myself, so I got excited when we started batting. In try-outs, we were in a big field with no foul-lines. At practice, I hit every ball that came at me. Right down the first-base line.

Next practice we got our positions. Right field. I didn't know a lot about baseball, but I knew right field was where they put the bad players. The only thing that ever came to right field was pop-flies and I couldn't catch those! I was stuck in right field with one job and I couldn't do it! I was such a... girl.

We played all season. Every game first thing I did was check out the other team, looking for another girl. I was disappointed every time.

I jumped over the baseballs I had just hit on my way to first base, only to have the pitcher chuck them over my head to the first baseman and hear the Ump call "OUT!" I knew I was out. He didn't have to rub it in.

I held my glove over my head and tried to get under those pop flies only to have misjudged and let them hit the ground twenty feet behind me. I'd hustle after them and run back infield because I couldn't throw them all the way to second base, which the runner had usually passed by then anyway.

We lost every game. Every. Game. While my teammates were friendly, I didn't make any friends. I felt like they thought it was my fault we lost every game. I just knew they thought it was my fault we lost every game. Because it's always one player's fault on a team. On my team, it had to be the girl's fault.

At the end of season pizza party, all the boys sat together at the long tables they'd pushed together. I sat at the end of one side eating pepperoni and Hawaiian and combination and filling red plastic cup after red plastic cup of soda from the pitchers scattered on the table. We were



poor at home and pizza was a treat! I gorged myself gladly. One of my teammates whispered to the group at the end.

“We got trophies! I saw the box when I went to the bathroom!”

“We got trophies? But we lost every game!” I whispered back.

“They’re over there!” he said, pointing not so discreetly.

Coach saw. His jig was up.

“Alright everyone, listen up! We’ve got some awards to give out.” He hoisted the box onto the table and the team whispered and smiled and pointed and awrighted.

Coach called each player’s name one at a time and told the team and the parents at the tables around us what was special about that player and how great they did. Over and over the identical trophies came out of the box. A six-inch gold boy in batting stance mounted on a wood base to a slab of marble with a two-inch bird, wings extended, mounted next to it. An engraved placard with the player’s first name and *1983* attached to the marble base.

I was happy I was getting a trophy. But disappointed it would be a boy. And my name would probably be spelled wrong. It’s Shelley. –*Ey*. Everyone always forgets the ‘*e*’ before the ‘*y*.’

Coach had one more trophy to hand out. He called my name. I stood up and sheepishly walked to the head of the table where he was presenting the little golden boys.

“Shelley is by far our most improved player. She was at every practice and every game on time. She listened to feedback and really hustled after those hits to right field. I can’t imagine it was easy being the only girl on the team. *And* in the league.” He put his arm around my shoulder, handed me my trophy, and said “Hope to see you next year!”

It was a girl! It was a girl with a ponytail! And boobs! I didn't even have boobs yet! And the placard said "SHELLEY 1983." With an '-ey'

I grinned from ear to ear and looked up at Coach. "It's a girl!"

"It's a girl," he grinned back.

The whole team cheered and clapped for me while I marched back to my spot at the end of the table. I showed Mom.

"It's a girl!" I declared, shoving my trophy at her.

She smiled. And cried. "That's *my* girl."

It was the only trophy I ever got for anything. I still have it. I keep it on my bookshelf where I can see it every day.

## The Procedure

I nodded and said okay a lot.

The nurse gave me some instructions. *Put all your clothes in this bag and put this on. Come back here when you're done.*

I went to the bathroom, got undressed and put all my clothes in the black trash bag. I put on the hospital gown. I was nervous. Young. Young and nervous.

I went back to the desk in the waiting room. It was the back waiting room. They had already called me from the lobby where my mom and boyfriend were still waiting.

*Take this pill. Sit there. Hang on to your bag. We'll call your number when we're ready.*

I grasped the little plastic cup with a little pill I remember being pink and lifted it to my lips. Then the Dixie cup of water.

I turned to find a place to sit. Most of the chairs were already full. The cheap plastic stackable kind of lawn chairs. I looked the youngest. *The Young and the Restless* was playing on the TV, mounted high in the corner of the room. It was a Friday.

I remember being surprised by all the other women there. They all looked so...older. And there were so...many. Like fifteen. I was number nine. I guess I somehow imagined it would be a few young girls "in trouble." Like me.

We were all looking at each other, but none of us was talking. Everyone looked sad. Maybe not sad. Maybe regretful. No one looked like they were okay with being there, like it was fine, like it was just a procedure.

The woman next to me and I started talking. I don't remember how the conversation started. She was much older than me, maybe mid-thirties. She told me about her kids. I told her

about my dog. We complained that *The Young and the Restless* was on TV. Dramatic love stories? Really? She was nice. It was nice to talk to someone. We wondered why it was taking so long. No one really gave us much information. In hindsight, they were waiting for the medicine they gave me to take effect. I still don't know what it was. A painkiller? Something to induce dilation?

I don't remember what came on after *Y&R*. Whatever was on CBS at noon in 1989.

I had come to the office a week before. Mom had to work, so my boyfriend and I were taking the bus. I had been taking the bus on my own since I was nine, but not to this neighborhood. I asked the driver if this was the bus that went to Lovejoy Street, and he confirmed it was. But it started winding indirectly the way buses do and I got scared we were on the wrong bus and were going to be late so I got off and called my mom from a pay phone.

She was pissed.

"I told you that was the bus." This was way before the internet, so she had gotten the schedules from a rack in the lobby of her downtown high-rise and confirmed our route in advance.

"Now you're going to be late. When you get there you tell them this needs to be taken care of *today*." She gave us another bus we could get on. We must have missed it. I called her again a few minutes later.

"Where are you? I'll have to leave work early and come get you." Really pissed now.

She picked us up and the corner and starts ranting. I can't remember what exactly was said, but I know I responded with "I'm sorry! I would think you'd be used to me screwing up by now." My boyfriend sat silently.

She had known I was pregnant before I had. The tampons were stored under her bathroom sink and I hadn't used any for a couple of months. My periods were irregular, so I didn't think anything of it. Nor of my swelling and so-tender-my-eyes-watered-when-I-walked-down-stairs boobs. I didn't think anything of the gross denial I was in. But Mom noticed. She made me an appointment at Kaiser for a "check-up."

The doctor told me a pregnancy test was routine. I know better now. She let me call my boyfriend from her office. I was sobbing. He told me it was going to be okay and asked me what I wanted to do. I sobbed more.

"I don't know! It's been five minutes!"

I asked the doctor if she had to tell my mom. She said there are patient confidentiality rules which prevent her from disclosing that. I asked her if my insurance covered abortion. It did.

I didn't tell my mom. I got home and called my boyfriend again. *Are you okay? What do you want to do? Are you going to tell your mom? I'm not telling my parents. I can't believe this is happening. We should have used rubbers.*

He walked me home from school every day and we had sex every afternoon. He always pulled out. He usually pulled out.

I told my best friend. She did not believe abortion was right. Neither did her mom. But I told her anyway because I needed my best friend. It was too much for her. She had to tell her mom. And her school counselor. Who in turn told one of my teachers I was close with – my former cheerleading coach.

Mrs. Colasurdo took me to the teacher's lounge. It was empty. I thought I was in trouble for something.

"So, I understand you have a big day coming up on Friday."

“Um, I don’t know. Not really.” I knew what was happening Friday, but she didn’t. What the hell?

She told me I had a friend who was worried about me and she let on she knew. She asked if I had told my mom. I said no. She said this was a really big thing to be going through alone, and that my mom would want to be there for me. I don’t think I went to any more classes that day.

I called my best friend and chewed her out. I called my boyfriend and sobbed to him. We agreed to meet at the park at talk. When I got home, my mom could tell I was upset. She asked me what was going on and I told her. She started crying and it became all about her. How she knew I was pregnant. How she should have talked to me more. How she didn’t want this for me.

When we finally got to the clinic, this appointment was for “counseling.” No procedure today. No one had told me that. And “counseling” consisted of a medical questionnaire. When I asked about the “counseling” portion, the person just looked at me.

“Do you need counseling?”

“I don’t know, I thought I was having it done today. The lady at the window said this was a counseling appointment. Is there counseling?”

“We prepare paperwork at the intake, but I can refer you to a counselor if you need one.”

“No. I’m fine. It’s fine.”

Did we ride the bus back to mom’s office or was she waiting there? I told her they didn’t do it today. It was just paperwork. It was next Friday. And I would need a ride home. I couldn’t take the bus.

After nearly two hours of sitting in the plastic lawn chairs and watching daytime television, our numbers started getting called. I guess they used numbers to protect patient

confidentiality. When the nurse called my number, I followed her out of the lawn chair room and down a long hallway. I started crying. She told me it would be okay. She wasn't the one killing her child.

It didn't hurt. It was very uncomfortable. It hurt a little. Like bad cramps. It was loud. Like a big vacuum. Well, I guess it was a vacuum. The nurse asked me to sit up. She and the doctor had their back to me talking about something.

"Excuse me, I think I'm going to vomit."

This nurse rushed over with one of those rounded trough-like things. My poppy seed muffin came up.

"Looks like a poppy seed muffin for breakfast!" She cheerily surmised.

I smiled faintly. Really?

I don't remember anything after that. They must have put me in some kind of recovery room. And given me my garbage bag of clothes. There must have been aftercare instructions. Obviously I walked back out to the lobby, we must have dropped my boyfriend off, and we came home. It was my sister's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Mom went back to work. My sister took me shopping with her for her birthday outfit. She didn't know. And it was never again spoken of.

Almost never.

Somebody was in the hospital the next week. Either Popo or Granddaddy. Mom felt obligated to have the whole family over for dinner. Something about it being her turn. Our family always came together when a grandparent was in the hospital. My house was full of aunts and uncles and cousins.

I stayed in my room on the phone with my boyfriend. I guess my cousins were asking about me and Mom knocked and walked in like she always did.

“They don’t know, Shelley. They think you’re mad at them.”

So I got off the phone and put a smile on my face. I came out of my room and kept up appearances. My cousins were glad to see me. They asked me what was wrong. I told them I was just tired. Really, really tired.



## Family Friend

Technically, I was molested. It was a family friend, well, the son of a family friend. Our families were friends. He was a few years older than me and I had a huge crush on him; I had for years.

My dad and his parents were upstairs at his house. It was an old house in northeast Portland, on Tillamook. We were in the basement watching TV or something. He put his arm around me. I don't remember a lot of the details. Was I eight? Was I ten? Twelve? I wasn't uncomfortable, I didn't want him to stop, and I didn't think any of it was bad. I was afraid someone would come downstairs and I would get in trouble. I don't remember ever thinking he would get in trouble. We didn't have sex or anything. At least not the traditional, boy-girl version of sex.

We kissed. He groped my boobs. (Did I even have boobs?) I touched and rubbed his dick. He finger-banged me. It was making out. And I was loving every minute of it. Paul liked me too! I had been in eight- (or ten- or twelve-) year-old love with him for as long as I could remember. And he was kissing me and touching me so that meant he liked me in my eight- or ten- or twelve-year-old mind. We did this again. And again. Every time I came over to his house we did it.

Then one time I came over to his house and his girlfriend was there. I was crushed. I didn't understand. I tried to play it cool. It was some girl from his high school, maybe junior high.

Then the next time I came to his house he wasn't there, and I hung out in the basement watching TV alone. I guess he was doing things with his friends.

My dad and his parents started to see each other less, or maybe I didn't go over there very often anymore. I guess I got older too. And the children of family friends grow apart and make their own friends at their own schools.

As I continued to grow up, I began to sort out what had happened. It wasn't so much that he molested me, but that maybe he took advantage of the girl he knew had a crush on him.

We ran into each other several years later. My dad and his parents were still friends, and we had heard about how each other was doing, but it had been years and years since we had seen each other. His best friend Grant and my good friend Brenda were both working at Breitenbush Hot Springs. I was visiting her, he was visiting him, and I came around the corner and there he was.

"OH MY GOD!" I shrieked and pounced on him with a ginormous hug. My friend Brenda and her boyfriend were very confused and looked at each other quizzically. He hugged me back and told them he had known me since my mom was pregnant with me, my whole life. The four of us laughed about how weird it was for us to meet again through them.

We laughed and caught up. He was married, I was in a long-term relationship. Work, how is my mom, how are his parents, sisters, etc, etc. And then he asked if I remembered the basement with a glint in his eye. I said I did. I didn't say it made me feel weird now. I laughed like it was fine and recalled the story of my tremendous crush to Brenda and Grant. And the evening went on and we all went to bed and I hugged him goodbye the next morning.

I still see him from time to time. Our parents did go to high school together and are still in the same circles. He is constantly a suggested friend on Facebook.

Technically, I was molested. But even if I was too young to consent, even if he took advantage, I wanted the attention and was a willing participant. So technically, I wasn't molested. Right?

## Mom

I have no memories of Dad living at the house. My parents separated when I was four, divorced when I was five, so as far as I'm concerned, it was always only Mom, my sister and me. Even our cats and dog were girls. We were a girl-powered home.

When they divorced in 1980, I was one of the few kids with divorced parents in my elementary school of about 300. I know this because I was one of a few kids who got called out of reading time once a week to meet with a school counselor. We went together. It was group therapy for first-graders. I don't know what they did with the second through sixth graders.

The 80's were pre-Family and Medical Leave Act, and Dad didn't pay the child support. If I got sick, I stayed home by myself while mom went to work at the bank and she called me once an hour. We were broke-ass-broke. Well, maybe not. I ate every day, and we always had the house, but Mom really struggled to keep it. She did, but it crumbled around her. Dry-rot in the bathroom. A huge hole in the hallway drywall where I had kicked it. Dated carpet and furniture. Water spots on the ceiling where the roof had leaked.

And the food was repetitive and basic. Dinner was usually one of five things: fettuccini Alfredo (milk, butter, flour and noodles), fried rice (rice, frozen peas and carrots, egg and bacon), spaghetti (ground beef, tomato sauce, spices and noodles), crepes (egg, flour, milk, rolled around bacon), or meatloaf (hamburger, onion, ketchup and bread crumbs. LOTS of bread crumbs). Lunch was a cheese or PB&J sandwich. Breakfast was cereal. Mom was gone for work by the time we got up (my sister took care of me) and we could make it ourselves. She made sure we knew how to cook everything for the nights she would be home late.

I complained about cheese sandwiches for lunch again. The other kids got these new things called Lunchables. Or hot lunch: pizza, Mexican haystacks, lasagna. They cooked in

schools then. Mom walked me to the refrigerator and showed me where she kept the lunch stuff and never made it for me again. I was nine. It was a good lesson.

When the garbage disposal broke down, she would refer to her “How to Fix Anything” manual by Reader’s Digest. She would stick a broom handle in there and wiggle it around until it worked again. I or my sister would hold the ladder while she cleaned the gutters until we were old enough to do it ourselves. If the washer broke, she would take it apart and usually change a belt, one of us holding the flashlight and the manual right next to her. Sometimes it needed a repairman and she would save for months. Which was difficult because the laundromat was an added expense. We brought all the wet clothes home and hung them to dry.

I made the mistake of complaining how she folded my laundry once. Mom took me out to the washer and dryer in the garage and showed me how to use it. And never did my laundry again. It takes me a few times to learn my lessons.

We camped out in the living room with wool blankets over the entryways and cooked hot dogs in the fireplace when the furnace broke. That lasted two weeks until my seven-year-old mouth let it slip to Granddaddy we were sleeping in the living room. I thought it was fun! He told my mom not to let his grandkids get cold. Ever again. And handed her a blank check.

She grew up in Lake Oswego, the most expensive suburb or Portland. One of four children to a CPA and a homemaker. Total Baby Boomer. It was a real *Leave It to Beaver* kind of ideal. Popo (my grandmother) and Granddaddy hosted clients in their home on Oswego Lake. They had grown up during the Depression, so they made their kids work for a lot of their luxuries, but the necessities were never in question. As much as Mom hated to do it, there were always her parents.

My sister was ten when my parents divorced. When Mom and Dad were still married, he had a good job at Kuni Cadillac back when collision auto repair paid well. Mom worked part-time at the bank and when a bill came, she wrote a check and paid it. There was no budget, no bill-paying day. Ann had nice clothes and a nice house for her first ten years. She noticed when we got poor. I never knew the difference.

Though we were poor, Mom always said we could still have dignity. She also always said I could do or be anything I wanted when I grew up. She also said we didn't need a man for anything. I was poor kid with straight teeth (her insurance paid for all but the \$15 per-visit co-pay), who always knew what fork to use. On the rare occasion when there were multiple forks. Like dinner at Oswego Lake Country Club, where my grandparents were members.

I walked by my older sister, who was very into dresses and makeup and hair, while she was primping in the bathroom.

“Oh my god. Will you at least part your hair?!”

I fumbled trying to brush my hair back in a straight line under her watchful eye.

“Just give it to me!” She snatched the brush, pulled my hair back and pushed it forward again then split the mop into a precise part. It took her about a second to get my unruly shoulder-length, string-straight locks in line. She was five years older than me and I have never been anything but an annoyance to her. She was being mean, but I liked that she was fixing my hair and making it pretty. Prettier than I ever could.

I was the rough-and-tumble type. I did have my moments of dress-up, like Easter and School Picture Day, and I loved my pretty dresses for a few years. But by the time I got to third grade, you couldn't pay me to wear a dress. Or comb my hair.

Every now and again, she'd buy me a dress for my birthday. I'd open it and scowl and she would sigh and hand me the receipt.

I shaved my legs for the first time when I was nine. I wanted to be like my big sister and my mom. And independent like Mom had taught me to be. The blood gushed out of my shin and I shrieked. Mom ran in and wanted to know why I was shaving my legs.

“Because you guys do it.”

She said I was too young. I thought I was being ladylike. It grew back thick and black. My sister called me “gorilla legs.”

I burped.

“That's not ladylike,” said Mom.

The two-tones-of-snot-green Mercury Bobcat (seriously, it was a *fake* Ford Pinto) broke down. She'd been married to my dad long enough to know it was the carburetor. She got a ride to the parts store. Rebuilt carburetor: \$75. Rebuild kit: \$25. We spent every night after she got home from work in the garage rebuilding the carburetor. It took us a week. And she'd get up the next morning and put on her pantyhose and work dress and walk the half-mile to the bus stop, work all day and come home to keep at it until it was fixed.

I swore.

“That's not ladylike,” she'd say.

It was this weird mixed-message I could never quite decipher when I was a kid. But now I get it. She was teaching me how to be all the things. How to not rely on a man for car maintenance and gutter-cleaning. And how to look pretty and be the things a woman was expected to be. Because knowing how to change a tire would be helpful and make my life easier.

And being pretty would make it easier, too. She was teaching me what she was learning as a single mother: Women have to be all the things, or we're not good enough.



## The Procedure 2.0

This time I knew. I was two weeks late and couldn't keep anything down. We drove to the store and got the test.

At least I was an adult this time, so I didn't have to deal with any judgement from anyone. No doctor's appointment made by Mom, no teachers pulling me aside, no best friends telling my secrets. Ron would be there for me. We'd been together a long time, owned our house, were partners in a business. We knew we'd terminate, and we'd go through it together.

I left the pee stick on the bathroom counter and checked the clock. Five minutes. I plopped on the couch in front of the TV to wait. Ron was in the computer room.

Nine minutes. I did not want to go in there because I knew what it said. I am such an idiot. Why am I here again? Why wasn't I on the pill? Why am I, at 24 (23? 25?) years of age, still using the pull-out method?

Ron came around the corner laughing.

"Whelp! You're preggers!"

I was stunned at his reaction. My head fell to my chest and the tears started streaming down my face, dripping into my lap. I did not want to have to do this again. Why am I such an idiot?

Ron's grin dissipated and he sat on the other end of the couch holding the pee stick looking at his feet. It's not like I didn't know Ron was emotionally unavailable, but the other end of the couch, really? No apology, no hug? Apparently not.

When we were at the office with our co-owners and employees, I would often run at top speed to the bathroom so I wouldn't puke all over myself. Ron would just watch me go by. He

didn't want anyone to know, so he didn't check on me. I didn't want anyone to know either, but he could have come up with some excuse.

I think I've blocked out a lot of it. Weird things are crystal clear. Like pulling over to the side of the road so I could barf. Other parts are gone. Like how old I was. I can pin it down to within a few years. How much did it cost? I don't think we were insured. Where did I go to the doctor to get the confirmation of pregnancy? No idea. How did I find the clinic? Probably referred by the phantom doctor. What clinic? I don't even know how to find out if I wanted to. Which I don't.

We got up early on a weekend. I think it was a Sunday. The clinic had an escort out front to guard patients from protesters. There were no protesters that day. The escort was reading a fat newspaper. But a Sunday doesn't make sense. Why would the clinic be open on a Sunday? Maybe it was a Saturday, and the escort was reading the early edition.

I couldn't tell you what the building looked like. I don't remember waiting as long as the first time. Don't know if it hurt, or what happened immediately after. I remember an ultrasound and the doctor confirming eight weeks.

No. It was a weekday. We lived in Battle Ground and we were stuck in I-5 traffic going north back to Washington. Or was there an event in Delta Park? It was a Friday. Had to be. I couldn't take time off work and needed the weekend to rest. We didn't make sales calls on Fridays.

Once we were back in the car, Ron asked me how I was. I said fine. He asked me what happened. I don't know what I said. Except for the ultrasound. I told him they took an ultrasound and said eight weeks.

He smirked. "Did they tell you if it was a boy or a girl?"

I fucking lost it. I went ape-shit crazy on him.

“DID YOU JUST SAY THAT TO ME?! DID YOU SERIOUSLY JUST ASK ME THAT?! What in the holy fuck, Ron? You are such a fucking asshole!”

We were stopped in the fast lane on the freeway in Delta Park, Portland Meadows directly to my right. I remember it being everything I could do not to get out of that car and walk across four lanes of stopped traffic to find a pay phone and call Melissa for a ride to her house. She was the only other person who knew. (Different best friend than last time. Better best friend.) I wasn't supposed to walk a lot or engage in strenuous activity for a few days. Doctor's orders. So I stayed in the car.

Ron's smirk quickly faded in the tirade. Silence ensued for the ride home. He went to the computer room. I got a blanket and lay on the couch in front of the TV. No idea what was on. I may have slept.

Mel called later that night. Ron had joined me on the couch. I told her what happened while he was sitting right there. We commiserated together. She apologized for his jack-assery, told me she loved me and if I needed anything to call.

Ron got pissed at me for telling Melissa he asked if it was a boy or girl.

We went back to work Monday. The nausea was gone.

## The Doctor

Technically, I was raped. Technically. It didn't feel like rape. It still doesn't *feel* like rape. But according to all the literature, according to all the things I've learned after working in women's studies, sexual assault prevention, after all the talks I've had with my friends, it was rape. I was raped. But I don't feel like I was *raped*.

I met Jeff on a dating site for people with HSV. Herpes Simplex Virus. I met Jeff on a dating site for people with Herpes Simplex Virus because I was still in a place where I was ashamed and I wanted a level playing field. Jeff was a doctor. Jeff had a doctorate in Chemistry. That kind of doctor. I didn't graduate high school. Jeff was handsome with a PhD. And he wanted to go out with me.

We had our first date at Portland City Grill. It was in May, and the view of the city stretched out all around us from the top of the US Bank Tower. We talked for four hours. Over four glasses of wine. Each. First date stuff. Families, work, college (*I didn't go to college – never wanted to.*). He was impressed with my wine knowledge and my managing the busiest specialty retail wine account in the state. He let me order his wine for him. I was impressed with his job at OHSU designing medical research projects. He walked me to my car. I don't think we kissed. I can't recall.

We had our second date. He told me he was moving to a different apartment in Northwest. I offered to bring him a bunch of beer boxes from work. We ended up going back to his apartment. He offered me a glass of water, which he poured from a pitcher from the fridge. It was the only thing in his fridge.

“Why is your refrigerator empty? What do you eat?”

He smiled sheepishly. “Taco Bell.”

“You are coming to my house and I am making you a real meal. With vegetables. Fresh vegetables.”

His eyes widened. “I would love that.”

Later that week, I brought him a bunch a beer boxes from work. And a stack of *Willamette Weeks* for packing material.

We had our third date at my house. A doctor was coming to my little townhouse for dinner! I spent the whole day prepping. I macerated fresh fruit in sherry for dessert. I baked potatoes on the barbeque with the lamb I marinated in rosemary and red wine, skewered onto rosemary branches with red bell pepper and onion. I roasted fresh vegetables with almonds, EVOO, salt, pepper and nutmeg in the oven. I picked two bottles of Northern Italian red – a barbera and a nebbiolo. I bought a fresh bag of weed. This doctor? He smoked. And he liked me.

He showed up at my doorstep empty-handed. No flowers, no wine, nothing. He had asked if he could bring anything, and of course I said no. But no flowers for a home-cooked dinner at a woman’s house? Really? But he’s a doctor! I wanted the doctor to bring me flowers.

I gave him the tour.

“This is the downstairs,” Vanna White-ing with my arms, “and this is the upstairs.” It was a duplex townhouse. There wasn’t much to show.

Just as I was finishing plating our dinner, a little spider greeted me in the kitchen while Jeff was outside on the back patio, playing fetch with my dogs.

“Oh hello there, little spider lady,” I said. “Let me get you back outside.”

“Do you need me to kill a spider for you?” he exclaimed heroically, running inside.

“Uh, no, I’ve got it.” I gave him the side-eye.

“Oh. Okay.”

I don't kill spiders, and I wasn't used to a man trying to save me from one. I don't need saving, thanks. But it was kinda cute.

He raved about the meal. He said he couldn't remember that last time he ate this well. *What was that flavor in the lamb? You skewered with rosemary branches? This wine is so good, what is it? These veggies are awesome. You use nutmeg? That's unusual. It's so good!*

We did the dishes together, I loaded up leftovers for him, and we retreated back to the patio to get high, drink wine, and eat dessert. He told me he wasn't going to drive home, he'd had too much to drink. We ended up upstairs. I wasn't ready to sleep with him yet, but my king size bed was a much more comfortable make-out spot.

The clothes started coming off. There was giggling and groping. He positioned himself to get started and I giggled “don't.” He ignored me. “Jeff!” I giggled louder, “stop!” He didn't. I wasn't scared or freaked out in any way. I was irritated. Like the kind of irritated you get when a solicitor comes to your door and you've politely said “no, thank you” a couple of times but they keep going with their spiel. Or when someone is arguing with you and they won't let you speak. You just sort of give up and let them go on and on and on. And Jeff did. And I quite clearly remember thinking, “Well, if this is going to happen, I might as well enjoy it.” So I kind of started to get into it. And then he finished. I laid next to him all night while he slept. I may have caught a few z's.

I made him breakfast in the morning. I was not happy about how things had gone down, but he was a doctor. And he liked me. We ate scrambled eggs with peppers and onion, and whole wheat toast with jam. There was coffee. With half-and half. And my dogs. And the sun on my patio. It was a lovely morning. Sort of.

It didn't work out with Jeff. Eventually, I asserted myself over something I don't remember and he wasn't too happy about it so he quit calling. I screwed it up with the doctor.

A few years later I was reading the newspaper in the drive-thru window at the bank where I was working. It was almost closing time. There was some article about some guy who worked at OHSU who had shot and killed his wife, then himself while his daughter and mother-in-law were in the next room. It was Jeff.

The story was written in a way that made the whole thing seem tragic, especially the successful doctor's struggle with depression and other mental illnesses. His then-girlfriend had gotten pregnant, and his being traditional, they had gotten married instead of...other options. I can't help but wonder how the story would have been written if Jeff had been a man of color. Or a mechanic. Successful white doctors who rape and kill have mental illness, and we should be sad for them.

I was and still am more weirded out by the fact I dated a guy who killed someone than by the fact that he technically raped me. By the fact that someone he murdered could have been me. I was only kind of raped by him. Lucky me.

## That Girl

Best. Date. EVER. It's been four days, and I can't stop smiling. The guy is pretty cool. But it had so much less to do with him than who I was Friday night.

There's this image we've all seen; attractive woman, short cotton sundress, ~~cowboy~~ *cowgirl* boots, long hair swept over one shoulder in a loose, messy braid, big, interesting earrings, natural yet colorful makeup, a cool smile and a confident glow. A guy looking at her with a playful, flirtatious glint in his eye. She is calm, quietly sexy, secure, aloof. And he wants her.

He's the guy's guy. Jeans, t-shirt, not particularly stylish, but the dude equivalent of casually put-together. And there is a cool car, maybe classic, or a bike in the background. Not a bicycle, a *motorcycle*.

I lived it Friday night. I lived that image.

My long dark hair was swept over one shoulder in that loose braid, the hot pink stripe adding a little punk rockabilly feel to the tousled weave. The dress was new-to-me, acquired at a clothing swap a few days prior. The cotton was soft, with an empire waist and a low v-cut tank neckline, revealing my ample bosom and letting my white lace bra escape occasionally for an enticing peek. Small, pale pink flowers freckled the loose cotton dress down to my mid-thigh, where my tanned bare legs exposed themselves for appreciation. The earthiness of the tan suede two-inch heeled pair of ankle boots set off the flamboyant lavender-sparkled gloss staining my lips. The earrings dangled the length of my long neck, sweeping my collar bones and pulling the individual strands of hair in my braid, disheveling it just that much more. It was one of the first sunny, warm days we all long for here in the drizzly gray of Portland, but the coolness of the



evening was setting in, so the fitted pink corduroy jacket was the perfect finishing touch. I looked good. I felt good.

He met me on the porch. Simon had already learned of my tendency for tardiness, so he tapped his toe playfully. I swung my legs out of the driver's seat and placed them simultaneously on the street, locked the car and sauntered my way up the steps to greet him. We kissed hello, and he grinned, telling me he liked my dress.

We've been dating a couple of months. We see each other once every couple of weeks. I think he likes me. I know he likes me, I'm just not sure how much yet. And I'm okay with that. This works for me for now. The last time I saw him, I was \*this close\* to a motorcycle ride. But he looked down and saw my gold snakeskin gladiator sandals and said no. Too dangerous. I would burn myself on the exhaust pipes. Dammit! But his concern was endearing.

Tonight, I knew there would be a bike ride. When we spoke, he said, "No sandals!" I laughed and said okay. This whole outfit was planned around being this image I had so long desired. It was my personal epitome of sexy. It was so....me. Casual, but done. Girly, but not foofy. Sexy, but not slutty. Easy, breezy, beautiful...Cover Girl.

After deciding on Nicholas' for dinner, he backed the bike out of the garage and met me at the end of his driveway. It was a red and white Yamaha, and the passenger seat had a back. I'm pretty flexible, but I wondered if I should slide my leg over the top of the seat, or justfuckitall and lift my leg over the back, showing the neighborhood my white cotton boy-short undies. I opt for the more ladylike, but significantly less graceful, sliding my foot over the back. I was wearing his black brain bucket helmet, y'know, the kind that just covers, well, your brain, so my braid and silver turquoise earrings were dangling out from under the chin strap. I tuck my short dress under my ass, situate the footrests in the crooks between the sole and heel of my

boots, wrapped my arms around his denim jacket, and away my bare-legged, cowgirl-booted self-went.

It's an image I've pictured in my head since I was a tween girl. The sexiness of it all was something I longed to have. To be.

"Freeway, or surface?"

"I don't care!" I tittered. We took the surface streets through NoPo, commenting on the development and gentrification of Williams Ave. I couldn't help but giggle and gleefully "WHEE!" the whole ride. The wind whipped through my braid, under my dress, over my bare legs. I could feel the heat of the exhaust caressing my calves.

"Are you cold?"

"No! Go faster! WHEE!"

He laughed and gunned it.

They were looking at us, all the people walking to sushi, wine bars, Starbucks. They were looking at my braid and earrings cascading out of the brain bucket. They looked at my short dress and my bare legs and my tan suede ankle cowgirl boots. They were jealous. They all wanted to be me, or wanted to be the one who had that bare-legged girl's pink corduroy arms wrapped around them. We were perfectly sexy.

The crowd outside the restaurant all looked as the bike roared to a stop in front. They watched us park. This time, I leaned into him and swung my leg over the back, white cotton boy-shorts exposed to the patrons. Because that night, I was *\*that\** girl. I was perfectly sexy, and flashing my undies while climbing off the bike is something *\*that girl\** did.

Once we sat down and open the menu, I had to get my glasses so I can read. My black rhinestone-rimmed glasses. I slipped them on and felt even more perfectly sexy than I did a

moment ago. I was all the sexy and smart, too. In that moment, I was the whole package. We order the vegetarian mezza and the lamb platter to share. We chat about his work, his house and projects, his solo cross country motorcycle ride, as I was gathering information to do the same...in my Subaru Outback wagon. We talk about my family, the recent passing of my grandmother.

“Were you close?”

I smiled widely. “Very. She was my buddy. We got mani-pedis together every couple of weeks. And she always got my very sarcastic sense of humor. Most of my family looks at me blankly when I crack my jokes, but Popo, she always laughed and laughed. She was a really neat lady.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Thanks. She died peacefully in the arms of two of her children. We should all be so lucky.”

He looked at me warmly and smiles. We split the check, as usual, something I really appreciate, boxed up the leftovers and headed to the bike.

I swung my leg over the back and we situate for the ride home. But first, a selfie. Because this is a night I announce on social media. It turns out cute. He’s smirking and peering over his glasses. I’m grinning wildly, our brain buckets match. “You know that short-dressed, cowgirl-booted, bare-legged, giggling pink streak you saw riding through NoPo last night? Yeah, that was me.”

I had to hold the leftovers. Now we’re on the bike, all that same sexiness, and y’know, I’m holding some leftovers, no big deal. We pass two other bikes on the way back to his place.

“Should I wave?”

“Sure.”

I wave wildly. Not that cool, low, biker wave, but a frantic waving to a friend in the airport wave.

“They waved back!” I cackle. “I’m such a dork!”

Simon smiles.

“Are you cold?”

“Nope! WHEE!”

Once we were back at his house, we sat on the porch and smoked cigarettes. The breeze had picked up and a spring chill swept over the neighborhood.

“That was so much fun, Simon! Thank you so much.”

“When was the last time you rode a bike?”

“Oh my gosh, like years ago.”

“What was the situation, like was it a boyfriend or what?” There is an inquisitive purse to his lips.

“Oh god, no. I dunno. It was probably a friend of a friend back in my early 20’s.”

“Oh.” He nods and a wide smile materializes across his face. I’m pretty sure he’s totally stoked that he got to be my first “boyfriend” ride. I don’t ask how many women he’s taken for rides. Because I don’t care. \*I\* got to go for a motorcycle ride. In a short summer dress and boots. And a pink corduroy jacket.

“I’m cold. You wanna go inside and listen to music?”

Simon’s music collection is exclusively vinyl. And it is vast, consisting primarily of classic R&B and hip-hop. He puts on Janelle Monae. Janelle Fucking Monae. He has Janelle Fucking Monae on vinyl. *The Electric Lady*. We talked about music. For hours. We talked about

school, my thesis and when I graduate. I explained how big a school PSU is, so I was going to the Honors College graduation because I didn't want to sit through 3500 names.

"What's the Honors College?"

"Um, it's the Honors College." I scowl at him. He has a bachelor's. This shouldn't have been new. I explained

"OH! Okay. Wow."

"Yeah. I'm really smart."

He looked at me with something going on behind his eyes. Y'know, the way someone looks when they're assessing you. He was impressed. I didn't care that he was impressed. I cared that I am smart. And in the Honors College. Wearing cute earrings and a loose braid.

I told him about the scholarship I won and that I am prepping another student to win.

"You're on a full ride?"

"I'm on better than a full-ride. It's all my tuition and living expenses."

"How did you get that?"

I told him the story.

"That sounds like a big deal."

"Over 4000 applicants, 86 interviews, 41 recipients."

He continued his assessment.

"I told you I was smart," I winked. Then I scooted closer. Janelle Monae was still crooning.

"Thanks again for the ride," I whispered in my sultriest voice.

"You're welcome," he smiled wryly, and leaned in to kiss the intelligent, diligent, fun-loving and funny ~~girl~~ *woman* in cowgirl boots and a cotton sundress. He leaned in to kiss *me*.

## Fat

“MOOOO.”

The first time I heard it in the hallway, I didn't get it. Who was that guy? Why did he just moo in my face? What a weirdo.

The next time, I got it.

“Step aside! Make room!”

I was walking into a classroom. There was plenty of space for me to pass. But four boys swept themselves far enough apart to let a car drive between them.

*They're making fun of me*, it dawned on me. *They think I'm fat*.

Seventh grade is such a lovely time in a young woman's life. Zits. Braces. Bangs. Boobs. Periods (we hoped!).

For the record, at the time I wore a size 11 acid wash jean and was 5'7". No Skinny Minnie, for sure, but so far from fat. Because at that time fat was a bad word to me. A bad state-of-being. I didn't want to be fat. I was definitely “more developed” than most of the other gawky seventh-grade girls. I knew it, and I was self-conscious about it. I thought I was fat. But I didn't think I was *fat*.

The boys were strangers to me. It was relatively early in the school year and we had all just come from various elementary schools to Highland Park Junior High, Home of the Raiders. I had a pretty solid gaggle of friends, some new, some carry-overs from Fir Grove.

*Whatever, you're all stupid idiots*, I thought. Sure, my feelings were a little hurt, and I was a tad embarrassed. It didn't destroy me. Not yet.

After class I met with my gaggle at our lockers in A-Hall. Seventh graders were in A-Hall, eighth in B-Hall, and ninth in C-Hall. I pointed the four boys out.

“Who are those jerks? They’re in my math class.”

Brian Dulong. Ben Potter. Some others.

It happened again the next day in math. And the day after that. Then more boys I didn’t know started calling me “horse” in the halls during passing time - the five minutes we got to get from one class to the next.

Confusion was my first reaction. I didn’t even know these boys. I was super fun and friendly, had my gaggle, and a big circle of other kids I talked to each day. I never did fit in with one group – not the jocks, or the stoners, or the rockers, or the nerds. I was all those things (well not a stoner – yet) so I made the rounds through all those circles. Why did these boys pick me to pick on? Did I do something to one of them? What could it have been? How did I bring this on myself?

Math again. Small group work. Subtle snorting from Brian, Ben, and the others.

“Mr. Ruehlman! Will you please tell them to stop?”

“What are they doing?”

“They’re snorting at me! They’re making fun of me!”

The squatty, balding man with the comb-over that wasn’t fooling anyone approached their cluster of desks and reported back.

“Shelley, they say it’s a two-way street and they’re not doing anything that you don’t do to them,” he chuckles at me.

My mouth hit the floor. Turning to them, I gave them my best seventh-grade dirty look. Mr. Ruehlman walked away.

Junior high lasted three years. Ben Potter was in my eighth-grade science class. Brian Dulong in my P.E. class. Other boys whose names I learned after the insults started were in the halls, the cafeteria, the courtyard. Every. Day. For three years.

O's were for *Outstanding*, S's for *Satisfactory*, N's for *Needs Improvement*. All O's with the occasional S in Math all through elementary. In first grade, I tested for reading comprehension at a seventh-grade level. By seventh grade, I tested at a college level. With junior high came letter grades. First term, A's and B's. B's in Math and P.E. Because I hate math, and even though I could run the whole mile (and the mile and a half), it tookayay me nine minutes twenty seconds. Every time, nine minutes, twenty seconds. To get an A, you had to run it in seven minutes or less. Yeah. How fast you could run affected your GPA.

Last term of seventh grade I had all C's and a D in French.

In ninth grade I took a print shop class. We learned how to make silkscreens for t-shirts, tablets of paper with a picture on each page, business cards (essential for every ninth-grader). Three of them were in my class. In C-Hall. My locker was right outside our classroom. I opened it after Print Shop to get my books for some other god-forsaken state-mandated torture chamber. There must have been hundreds of them cascading over my coat and books out onto the floor. During passing time. So all the other kids could see. I looked down to see what they said.

DEAL A MEAL!

That's it. On hundreds of 3x5 cards. All over the floor.

DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL!  
DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL!  
DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL!  
DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL!



MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A  
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MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A MEAL! DEAL A  
MEAL!

Deal-a-Meal was a diet plan Richard Simmons sold in his heyday. Each card had a recipe on it for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. Plan your daily meals on the left side of the handy slotted folder, and as you eat, move them to the right! Once you're out of cards, you're done eating for the day!

Scooping up a handful, I returned to print shop. I dumped them on Mr. Korver's desk and stared at him blankly.

"Ben Potter and Brian Dulong made these in here and shoved my locker full of them."

They hadn't left class yet.

"POTTER! DULONG! STAY WHERE YOU ARE."

They must have done it during class. I had seen them huddling. I had not seen them escape to slide them through the slots in my locker door.

Glancing over my shoulder as I walked out, Korver was shaking the cards at them and chewing them out. He was beet red. It took three years, but a teacher finally had my back.

Mr. Korver pulled me aside the next day. *Oh*, I thought, *this is where I get in trouble for tattling*. It was stupid to think a teacher would believe me. Arms crossed. Jaw clenched.

"I'm really sorry they did that. I should have kept a better eye on their project. If anything else happens, I want you to tell me immediately. They've been warned."

Oh. Arms fell to sides. Jaw drops.

“Thank you, Mr. Korver. I will.”

It didn't help. It all continued. They were just more careful around Mr. Korver.

There were good days. School-clothes shopping had resulted in a really nice cashmere gray sweater with one great big black-and-white argyle on it. Paired with the mid-calf A-line flared skirt, gray flats and a particularly good bangs day, I felt pretty.

Tricia Randall and I were hanging campaign posters for my run at Student Council treasurer. Thick tempura paint letters and a sloppy rendition of a telephone screaming *Hurry! Quick! Pick up the telly! Ask all your friends to vote for Shelley!* Someone walked by and oinked. My shoulders slumped. My head fell. I was exhausted. The tears started to roll. I plopped onto the bench and Tricia put her arm around me.

Mr. Cady, my guidance counselor, caught me wandering the halls later that afternoon. A-Hall. Shuffling my gray flats along the standard cream-and-brown-swirled school tile floors, dragging my fingers along the wall, empty eyes looking at nothing in particular.

“Shelley! Where is that happy smiling face and cheery attitude you always used to have? What's going on?”

“Nothing. I'm fine.”

“Let's talk in my office.”

He reviewed my declining grades. Recalled my decrease in energy.

“It's not even winter break yet and you're averaging two days a week at school. You're a bright girl. Is it something at home?”

Mr. Cady was great. He was down-to-earth, approachable, always asked what I wanted to take for classes rather than trying to push me into things I wasn't interested in.

I sighed and spilled the beans between sobs. About the teachers who did nothing, about Mr. Korver who did something but with no lasting results, about my mom telling me to just ignore them and don't give them the reaction they want.

"I'll take care of it. Give me names."

Once I started rattling them off, he stopped me so he could write them all down.

It was going to stop! It was finally going to stop! And they were all so busted. Maybe they'd get in-school suspension. Or out-of-school suspension. Maybe they'd get expelled!

First period the next day. Pre-algebra. With them. Not the best way to start a day, but this was a new era in surviving junior high!

"NARC."

Brian Dulong was glaring at me with his rat-pack back-up.

"Little tattletale."

Are you fucking kidding me?

"Shelley, sit down! Class is starting."

Mrs. Smith had witnessed all their bullshit and done nothing, and now she was snapping at me to sit down?

Nothing changed. Actually, it did. It got worse. Now they mooed, oinked, snorted, called me "horse" *and* "narc" *and* "tattletale." I did not tell Mr. Cady.

I lost the election for Student Council treasurer.

"It was so close, Shelley, just a few votes!" said some advisor. Yeah. A few votes. Sure.

I continued my sporadic attendance. They continued to harass me. I showed up to first-period math class. It was late in the year and summer break was fast approaching. Ben Potter was leaning on the open door in the hallway.

“Are you going to share your doughnuts?”

I had no doughnuts. I had enough. I dropped my bag, grabbed his shirt and slammed him against the door as hard as I could. I got my face so close to his if you didn't know better, you'd have thought we were kissing.

“Fuck you. Shut the fuck up about me. I am so done with you and your shit. Say another fucking word to me about anything and I will kick your ass,” I growled lowly and slammed him against the door again for punctuation. He looked surprised.

“Shelley! You're late. Let's go.” Mrs. Smith had witnessed nothing, or at least did nothing.

“Can I go to my locker and get my book?”

“No. You should have done that before class.”

Gathering my bag from the floor, I turned up the aisle to get to my desk and muttered “You are such a bitch.”

“Excuse me?”

I set my bag down, about faced, looked her dead in the eyes and said, “I called you a bitch.”

“Let's go to the office.”

I got suspended. For a week. Out of school. Banned from the ninth grade prom. Kids who smoked on campus didn't get that harsh a sentence. Ben Potter, Brian Dulong and crew never got any sentence. Not even detention.

## Tonka Dump Truck

I loaded that thing up with red lava rock, vroom-vroomed it over to the pea gravel, lifted the hinged bed and screwed up my parent's rock garden. Then I'd fill it up with pea gravel and vroom-vroom it over to the white marble-like chunks across the driveway and screw up the side yard. After one of our notorious Portland rains, I'd load it up with mud I'd scooped with my bare hands and vroom-vroom it around the neighborhood trying to sell mud pies.

It was the first Christmas present I remember getting. I was three. There is a picture somewhere of me opening it. I am holding the truck, still in the box, high over my head with the biggest little kid grin you ever saw sprawling across my face. You can see the bright yellow truck through the clear plastic windowpane of the box and the tiny red Tonka logo on the door. It was the passenger kind of truck, not the industrial construction model. I have no idea what else I got that Christmas. Just that I pushed that truck all over the shag carpet loading it up with paper and bows and vroom-vrooming it all over the house.

"You don't get girls dump trucks," Dad had protested.

"She wants a dump truck. She's getting a dump truck," Mom asserted.

There weren't many kids on my street yet, and the ones my age were boys. They all had toy trucks. I wanted a toy truck, too.

When we first moved into the house, I was 18 months old and the development was new construction. There was little to no landscaping in the neighborhood and none in our yard. The backyard had a row of hawthorn trees separating our lot from the huge field owned by the small Methodist church behind us. The Hargers, our neighbors to the left, were members there and the church let them till and plant a huge garden, maybe a quarter the size of a football field. He

planted corn and tomatoes and cucumbers and zucchini and squash and pumpkins and snap peas and sunflowers. Me and my dump truck helped harvest and haul more than a few mini-loads of crops to the neighborhood. No one bought veggies. Mr. Harger grew them for us all. And I always delivered Mom's in that truck. It took a lot of trips. It held, like, three cucumbers. Maybe six tomatoes if I packed and balanced them right.

Tonka Toys were metal back then. Rough, porous lava rock, the jagged edges of the marble-like rock and the sheer volume of pea gravel and mud took their toll over the years. The truck dented, the paint chipped and the bare spots began to rust. The Tonka logo wore off the door and I think it may have even lost its windshield along the way. But I hung onto that truck.

I had that yellow Tonka dump truck for years and years. When my parents got divorced, I had to go up to Dad's house every other weekend, and somehow, that truck ended up there. It sat on the floor of the closet in my room. I didn't play with it anymore – I was getting too old for baby things, but I still liked having it. Tonka toys were plastic by now, and I liked my rusty old metal one.

I opened my closet in my room one day and noticed it was gone.

“That's weird,” I thought. I figured I'd moved it long ago and forgotten what I did with it.

Here's the thing about my dad. He was a terrible father. He had a ferocious temper that could go off at any minute for any reason. Every other weekend I spent in my room or in front of the TV trying not to get yelled at and always afraid I'd get hit. He never did hit me, but I knew he had hit my mom and my big sister before. That's why they got divorced. I hated going there. Several times during each of my two-day sentences he'd bellow for me from the garage, where he did collision auto repair on mostly classic cars. He'd need my little hands to get a screw he'd

dropped into some unreachable abyss. Or decided he didn't want to mask the tail and headlights so he'd make me do it. Then yell at me for doing a shitty job and rip it off and do it himself.

But for all that fury he really did love kids. When we would camp with friends, he told stories around the campfire with all different voices. When my friends were in the car, he sang silly new lyrics to the songs on the radio. Maybe his own kids were just too much kids.

Anyway, I asked him where my dump truck was. And he told me since I never played with it he had given it to the little boy who lived across the street. He gave away my yellow Tonka dump truck. My fear of him vanished and I unleashed a fury of my own. I yelled at him the way he always yelled at me. *It wasn't yours to give! You hate that I'm a girl who likes boy's toys! They aren't metal anymore and it was the first toy I remember getting! How could you?!*

He chuckled at me and said "If you want it so bad, go over there and get it back." For all my frustration and as badly as I wanted my Tonka, I wasn't going to go across the street and make a four-year-old kid give me my truck back.