

The Thing I Came For

A MEMOIR OF TRAUMA AND RECOVERY

OLGA-MARIA CRUZ

I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail. ...

The thing I came for:
the wreck and not the story of the wreck
the thing itself and not the myth.

Adrienne Rich
DIVING INTO THE WRECK

I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten...

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PREFACE

In “The Art of Time in Memoir,” Sven Birkerts argues that the literary memoirs of the modern era are tales either of coming-of-age or of trauma survival. This memoir is both. I have made several attempts to write a narrative of my time at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where I studied for nine years and took two advanced degrees. I used to think I understood that story. I used to think I understood myself. But when the third iteration of that memoir was complete, I found myself having intensely unpleasant sensations whenever anyone spoke to me about my writing. I felt sometimes as if my arms were burning up from the inside. Sometimes I felt faint, or unable to speak. I looked online for a counselor who was a trauma specialist, and found one, Dr. Katie Dine Young. She turned out to be the best fit possible—the best partner and guide I could have on this rough journey. With her help, I have begun at last to comprehend my own mind, and the ways in which it conspires with my body to protect me. And as she helped me delve into memories deep in my past, and emotions I’d never let myself experience fully, I began to realize that my real story was far more personal—a coming-of-age delayed by trauma.

Joan Didion said, “I write to find out what I’m thinking, ... what I see and what it means.” Perhaps, in these pages, I write to find out how it is, really, that one survives when events dreaded as the worst possible fate come to pass. When, as a child, one’s best-beloved parent dies, suddenly disappearing overnight. When, as a young woman on her own, one is raped, stalked, and terrorized. When one is, however implausible it may sound, sexually assaulted a dozen times over fifteen years, by different boys. How does one cope? What are the internal mechanisms that allow for forward motion? Western society, as most of us have likely discovered, does not permit us a long recovery. No one has much patience for a widow still bereft after twenty years; even an orphan really should look

cheerful after a year or two has gone by. “Do you still miss your father?” people ask. Which makes it seem odd to dream of him so often, thirty years later.

Certainly there are memoirs of worse traumas—Jaycee Dugard and Pat Conroy come to mind. Missing from most accounts, though, is an exploration of the actual psychic phenomena that allow for survival. And yet this is the exact question foremost in our minds. Certainly, we want to learn what it was like to undergo the trial, but perhaps more urgently we wonder how it is that the victim carries on. The boy who lost his entire family in a plane crash. The little girl sold into prostitution. The Sandy Hook classmates who were shot at but not shot. How do they get out of bed in the morning? Or perhaps it is most terrifying to try to sleep.

The most dramatic trauma narrative we have, perhaps, is “Sybil,” which (whether or not it is exaggerated) is also singular in its clear focus precisely on the defense mechanisms of the mind. Only in extreme cases does the psyche actually fracture to the point of creating separate identities to deal with different memories, feelings, relationships. Sybil’s is the best-known case of what is now called Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). Each of her fifteen “alter” personalities came into being in childhood and adolescence as she endured and sustained brutal abuse. My own traumas were not so brutal, nor so sustained, and my psyche’s split was not so complete as to form independent identities. I have Parts, not distinct dissociative identities. My Parts are merely memories, frozen states of being, that work together to keep me from being overwhelmed, and keep me functioning in the world.

It sounds crazy to say it out loud. It feels crazy, sometimes, to live it, too, this feeling of being inhabited, haunted, fragmented inside. My Parts knock on my sternum, or pinch my neck, clench my throat to get my attention, like a ghost might do. They sing and talk inside my head, rattle their metaphorical chains. They need my attention, often my undivided attention, which is logistically difficult to manage much of the time. A friend commented once that the “Tribe,” as he likes to call them, were a troublesome bunch. I can see how they would seem that way, but his characterization

didn't feel right to me. My Parts don't mean to be difficult, and their existence in my psyche does *not* mean I'm crazy. I don't break with reality; I don't lose time. My Parts are helpers, very powerful ones, even the ones who don't feel powerful. They hold all the memories and thoughts and feelings and beliefs of almost a dozen different traumas; they hold them in cold storage, preserve them in amber until I find the maturity and the strength and the resources to process them.

How else could I survive?

Not everyone does, you know. Without the clever resources of my Parts, I might have become an addict, might have killed myself or been unable to complete my education, to have a healthy relationship, hold down a job. The tragedy of addiction, suicide, and other failures to flourish is that, sometimes, some people's Parts go too far in self-destructive directions, trying to numb them from the pain inside. I am one of the lucky ones. My Parts have saved me, over and over again, and brought me to a place where I can finally acknowledge and help them. Knowing that my psyche can operate in this way frightened me at first, but now I find it comforting. Life is good right now, but it is likely to get much harder again at some point. I fear accidents, illness, violence, wars. But now I know I can get through anything. No matter how overwhelming life becomes, I'm getting stronger, and I can handle it; and if I can't, my Parts can take it on, divide responsibility, keep me alive and sane. For a while at the beginning of our work together, I was worried I might have DID, or develop it in the future. Katie reassured me that my mind is not diseased nor deteriorating. I am more likely than most to experience DID in the face of another overwhelming traumatic event, she said, but that fragmentation, if it ever took place, would be an amazing coping skill, a survival technique that would keep me alive.

When you're little and a beloved parent dies, you can't cry all day, for weeks and weeks, but, perhaps especially when you're a child, part of you needs to. You can't kill yourself, because that would

make things worse for the people who love you, but part of you wants to. Survival depends on other parts, subconsciously, coming forward and taking over—parts that know how to do things, that hold procedural memories like how to make breakfast and do algebra. You're "going through the motions" for a while because more capable parts are stepping up, letting your core self grieve and panic and rage.

The truth is, unpleasant feelings don't always fade over time. Some feelings are so big, it seems there's nowhere for them to go. And you can't make feelings go away, especially when you're little and have limited resources, especially when the people around you aren't comfortable with your having feelings at all. If you're not allowed to talk about how you feel, if you're not allowed to *act* angry or sad or scared when you *are* angry or sad or scared, it only makes it worse. The feelings get stuck inside, in the body as well as the mind, in the organs of your viscera.

And so I began again to write this memoir; I began in a new direction. What follows is a narrative of a delayed coming-of-age, finding a path to recovery from repeated loss and violence.

Katie Session

I visit my psychotherapist, Katie, once every two weeks. I sit on her grey sofa, hold little paddles in my hands that vibrate one at a time, back and forth, to calm my subconscious mind and my nervous system. She offers me tea and I say no. I just want to hold the soothing paddles, turn down the volume on the excess stimulation that churns inside me. The rhythm of the “tappers,” as we call them, helps the tightness in my chest unclench just slightly. It helps the pressure on my larynx ease up just a bit. These sensations come and go. I can’t control or predict them. They are caused by different Parts of my unconscious mind, sub-personalities you could call them. It’s fairly common in cases of trauma, especially repeated trauma, especially in girls, apparently, that the psyche fractures in this way, holds unfulfilled needs and unresolved emotions in separate containers. Some containers hold physical tension, knots in the shoulder muscles, stomach pain, back pain, headaches. Some containers hold emotional tension from the past—anger, anxiety, exhaustion, grief, or fear, for example—frozen in time. This is how I ended up medicated for “free-floating anxiety.” My anxiety only seemed free-floating because it was not clearly connected to what was happening in the present. It was completely connected to what *felt* like was still happening in the past. But “container” is just a metaphor. These are Parts—younger versions of me, stuck at different ages and stages of development, stuck with certain jobs. What Katie and I do is work to connect with those Parts, to hear what they’re saying, find out what they need, so we can help them integrate into my core Self.

We use a variety of tools developed to heal mental trauma, within a general model called Internal Family Systems, which sees people as containing a variety of sub-personalities that work together to maintain functioning. Each of the Parts wants or needs something. Some are in distress—weeping, furious, terrified, exhausted. Others are focused, working hard to keep me on task, to keep me from feeling or even knowing about all the anger and sadness and fear that’s been locked away. Most of the time, I shouldn’t even know their efforts are going on; it’s all supposed to be behind the

scenes. But some days, for some reason, a hurting Part comes forward and shoves me in the chest or grabs me by the throat. That's what it feels like. And then I have to listen, or things get really bad. Right now, as I write this, some Part is tapping on the left side of my sternum and filling my throat with the sensation of tears. They don't want me to tell. In a few minutes, one of them will put me to sleep. I won't be able to find my words; I'll suddenly feel completely wiped out. There's only so much we can take.

Some Parts have no words—they communicate via images or feelings, or physical sensations—but they all have something to say, and something they need. There are Parts that hold happier memories, like a special trip to a doughnut shop, and feelings like confidence about travel and joy at being in a spotlight. Katie helps me try to soak up these positive feelings and pass them on to the hurting Parts, to comfort them.

I imagine that this dissociative tendency is why I never went through the anger phase of grief after my father died. I have often said, "I don't really get angry." It may explain why earlier counselors found it impossible to get me to identify any of my feelings at all. I have Parts for that—Parts that hold the anger I can't face or express without judgment, the irrational fears which others might scoff at, the grief I'm supposed to "be over" by now. My Parts secret these emotions away when I can't express or process them. Sometimes they do their jobs so well, I forget I ever had those feelings.

CHAPTER ONE

One of my earliest memories is of sitting in a canvas backpack, high on my father's shoulders, my hands around his forehead, my fingers in his kinky black hair. The texture of that hair was so distinct, nothing like my mother's straight, shiny bob. My being in the backpack meant we were out on a hike, usually walking through Tryon Creek Park in Portland, Oregon. I remember fitting my toddler fingers into the lines on Papí's forehead, the slightly greasy feel of his face as he hiked in the sun. The scruff of his fierce black beard, the crinkles around his eyes, laughing or squinting. I used to sing up there, sway left and right with the rhythm of his walk. It was the safest, happiest place on earth.

I wasn't one of those physically curious kids who always wanted to be running all over the place, gathering sticks or looking for arrowheads. I was literally on top of the world— Papí was my world—and from my backpack perch I could look lovingly down on my little domain: the beauty of nature and my parents quietly enjoying each other's company.

When I wasn't in the backpack, I had to walk, which generally required more effort than I wanted to expend. But I sorted out that when I lagged too far behind Mommy and Papí, they would slow down, or, more often, pick me up and carry me for a while. So sometimes, when I felt bored or tired or left out of the conversation, I would deliberately slow my pace, drag my feet, look pitifully downward. And every time, they would stop and turn back to me, call me one of a dozen pet names: *Olgita. Petunia. Dovey. Mushki...* Maintaining my pitiful expression, I would slowly raise my arms over my head, and someone who loved me would carry me again, on his shoulders, or right next to her heart, where I could hear their grown-up conversation murmur over me.

The three of us lived in a little yellow house in Milwaukie, Oregon, just outside Portland. It was my mother's hometown—her father, sister, grandparents, aunts and cousins all lived nearby. My grandfather ran a butcher shop, my great-aunt the adjacent drugstore. Our little house had a little tree outside, with low and sturdy limbs and shiny dark leaves, a Chinese maple, and I would climb it, even at two and three years old. I was so tall, standing just one extra foot above the ground, so clever, peering out from behind the branches. For my third birthday, my grandfather gave me a purple tricycle with glittery plastic streamers at the handlebars, and a woven plastic basket fastened to the front. Inside the basket was a string of lollipops inside clear wrappers. Every week I rode my trike to the public library that was just at the end of our street. I put crusts of bread in my basket to feed the ducks in the pond outside the library, then went inside and picked out books, and pedaled back up the slight hill to home, brand new books in my basket.

We lived there the first three years of my life, and through much of that time, my father was away, travelling, looking for work. My mother was a physical therapist and worked at the local Shriner's hospital for children. I had a babysitter, a family friend. When Mommy and Papí were home, we hiked and read books and played records. We sang Peter, Paul, and Mary songs together— "Puff, the Magic Dragon," "Leaving on a Jet Plane." When they were away, I sang the same songs to myself and realized how sad they were, how sad I was. I remember the feeling in my stomach, like it was full of rocks from the pond, and just above that, like my heart had holes in it. I carried my pale green "blankie" in front of me to cover up my heavy stomach and my empty heart. I didn't always eat all my food, because I had already eaten rocks somehow. I sucked my thumb, but couldn't keep from crying whenever I heard "Leaving on a Jet Plane." My father was always doing that, and I was the one who didn't know when he'd be back again.

Papí did come back, to move us to Washington, D.C., where he'd found some sort of job with the government. We drove across the country in a rented truck and set up our new home, a high-rise

apartment in Crystal City. It was vast and empty. We had nowhere near enough furniture to make it look like people lived there: no rugs for the floors, no art for the walls. Papí made a bookshelf out of plywood stacked on concrete cinder blocks turned sideways. It made a space just tall enough for Papí's record collection, which took up two long shelves. On top of that were shelves of books, and on top of that, the radio/record/tape player. I had a cinder-block shelf, too, for my books and few toys and dolls.

We lived in that apartment when Mommy got a perm, and when Papí shaved his black beard and I screamed and cried because I didn't recognize him. That was where we lived when I learned to read, where I listened to books on records and my parents read to me every day and taught me the alphabet, and where I looked over their shoulders when they ignored me in favor of newspapers or magazines, and one day the two-letter words jumped up at me and waved. "Look, Mommy—*at, to, it, on*. There's another *it*. *If, in, of, be, up!*" That was the apartment we lived in when Mommy burned my right eyelashes off by mistake because she was smoking and reading me a book at the same time. That was the apartment we lived in when I had to take medicine and it made my pee a funny color. That was the apartment we lived in when I dressed up like an angel and sang "Silent Night" in front of a tiny Christmas tree.

That was where we lived when Mommy and Papí argued and Papí took me out for a walk and we bought her flowers and chocolate milk. That was where we lived when Mommy signed me up for swimming lessons at the rooftop pool, but I was scared of the swim teacher and scared of the water and screamed bloody murder until someone called Child Protective Services and I got to go back inside. That was where we lived when I had to go to preschool and didn't want to go, when I held Mommy's leg so hard, but Papí pulled me off. Grown-ups were big. They could always pull you off their legs; they could put you where they wanted you, dress you how they liked. They could get in the car and drive away. *

A few years later, we moved to an actual house in Alexandria, Virginia, a little farther from the city. It was half of a duplex, a rental, with a climbing tree in front and enough yard on three sides to plant a little garden. I got to have a cat. I named her Felicia.

That was the house we lived in when I joined Brownie Girl Scouts; when my brother, Cooper, was born; when President Reagan was shot; when a plane crashed into the Potomac River downtown and almost a hundred ^{people} died. When there was a snowstorm that piled the snow higher than my shoulders; when Felicia had four kittens and I named them Mozart, Bach, Vivaldi, and Haydn, and the Husky across the street got loose and killed every one but Vivaldi. That was the house we lived in when I learned to swim and ride a bike and fish and play the violin and the recorder; where Mommy woke Cooper and me up late one night and took us to the park to play in the snow under a bright, full moon.

On Sunday mornings, Papí and I would get in the car to take a drive down the leafy quiet of the George Washington Parkway. We'd go to a doughnut shop and sit in a big booth, just the two of us. He would get black coffee in a mug, a frosty glass of milk for me, and one doughnut each. Often a honey-glazed, sometimes a cruller, sometimes a plain or powdered sugar cake, or a Bavarian crème-filled doughnut, which Papí ordered for me because Bavaria is where I was born.

The walls of the booth were so high, and I so small, that Papí was all I could see, sitting across from me, reading the *Sunday Post* while I looked at the “funny pages.” We made a little world of our own. I don't remember what we talked about, but I know it was everything. There was nothing I kept from him, and seemingly no subject he didn't want to teach me. Over the fourteen years I had with him, my father taught me how to cook rice and beans, how to paint a room, select the best lumber, how to hold a hammer and nail, tighten a c-clamp without looking—“blind positioning” he called it.

“Like when I put the back on an earring!” “Exactly. Exactly.” Papí taught me how to hit a baseball, left and right-handed, so I could be a switch-hitter. He taught me to wring out a washcloth properly so it doesn’t drip; how to polish my white patent leather shoes with Colgate. As he polished his work shoes with a stinky, dark paste, I sat next to him, shining my little Mary Janes and making them minty fresh.

He taught me some Spanish, and the Phoenician alphabet. Then he would leave little coded notes that, once I transliterated the Phoenician, would sometimes turn out to be in Spanish—an encouraging or silly message from my amazing Papí. He wrote me postcards when he was away. He traveled a lot, still, for the State Department, or as a Disaster Relief Coordinator for the American Red Cross. He also taught Ethics part-time at Georgetown University. The buildings smelled like old books and his desk had a mug with the Puerto Rican flag on it and butterscotch candies inside. I colored, sitting in the back of his classroom, while he taught sometimes, and I was proud of him, and proud to be there, surrounded by smart grown-up people talking about smart, important things. We didn’t get to talk on the phone while Papí was gone, but he always brought home gifts for all of us. When he came back from a week in India, I got a miniature alabaster Taj Mahal jewelry box; when he went to Kenya he brought me back a shield covered in wildebeest skin. It was kind of useless and nowhere near as beautiful as my jewelry box, but he had photos of African warriors with spears, and animals I’d never seen at the Washington Zoo, and I really liked saying “wildebeest.”

The biggest lessons and most serious talks were moral ones, grounded either in historical examples, like the Civil Rights movement, or current events, including the Cold War: “The US and the Soviet Union between us have enough nuclear bombs to make the earth a gas ball like the sun, three times over,” he told me. I remember reading Ray Bradbury’s story, “There Will Come Soft Rains” when I was about ten. Papí explained that the charred outline of children and a ball in the air

between them was what happened in an atomic explosion. “If the Soviets bombed us here in DC right now,” he said, “you and I would be a black shadow on this wall, just like in the story.”

Papí taught me, by example, to be warm and friendly with servers, janitors, toll booth workers, parking lot attendants. Anyone who looked remotely Hispanic, he would greet with “¿*Como estas?*” I knew some Spanish—my letters and numbers, the words for things in nature, which we would name when we went out on frequent walks—*la playa, la mer, el perro, el sol*. But I could barely follow the fast-paced conversations that would ensue when Papí handed money to a cashier with a, “*Gracias. ¿Como estas?*”

I began to dissociate around the age of six, about the time I started first grade. It never happened at school, though I always worried it would. It happened at home, in the mornings when the house was quiet and I was alone in my room or in the kitchen. My consciousness would split into pieces—most vividly, my face would split left and right. I could feel each side with its own expression; I could hear voices left and right as different people talking to each other. Fighting with each other.

The right side of my face was panicked and keyed-up, experiencing everything I was doing (making my bed, brushing my teeth) as happening too slowly. “Hurry up! Hurry up!” it would say. “Omigod-omigod-omigod!” The left side would watch the right side and scoff. “Slow down. So what? It doesn’t matter. You’re so stupid. Shut up.” My right face felt like my eyebrow was raised and my mouth open; on my left face, my eyebrow felt lowered, the lips pursed and curled into a sneer. I had to check my reflection in a mirror. It was curious, and concerning: every time, I wondered, which face would I see? Panic Face? Scorn Face? Or the Neutral Observer who floated a foot above my head? But the girl in the mirror had no expression. Her face was tenantless, affectless, which was even more frightening. I could never be sure that I would come back to myself. What was left felt like a diminished

version of me, withdrawn inside my chest. I was the one moving my body, but my thoughts and feelings seemed to be taken over by these strange and stronger entities.

Though I couldn't read a clock yet when these episodes first began, I knew they didn't last long. By the time family came around and expected me to interact, the splitting sensation would fade and my core self would emerge to take over again. This pattern continued over the next fifteen years: as I got older I would check a clock before I checked the mirror. The episodes lasted about ten to fifteen minutes, and happened only a few times a year. But time went by so oddly during the dissociations, and there was no way to predict or control their onset. Panic Face and Scorn Face came and went at their own will. Besides watching with a detached interest, the Neutral Observer seemed to have no distinct personality, and only showed up when Panic and Scorn started one of their fights. Other times, I didn't sense any of them at all. They did not feel like a part of me—they showed up as extreme reactions, out of proportion to what was going on. It didn't make sense to get upset about making toast or getting dressed, the simple daily things I'd be doing when they showed up. They even said things to each other, like "Oh my God," and "Shut up," that I myself would never say.

Dissociating was shocking and upsetting. At six years old I didn't have the words to try to make sense of my experiences. I didn't name these characters showing up in my face. I didn't talk about it; I tried not to think about it. I had no means of comprehending what was happening to me, but I came to the conclusion that I was probably crazy. Even as a child, I understood that "crazy" is what you call people whose actions or feelings don't match what is going on. In a few years I found a way to talk to my mother about it. I had heard somewhere about people—crazy people—who heard voices. I told Mommy, "I feel schizophrenic sometimes." I explained as best I could what it felt like to have my awareness suddenly split into pieces.

Mommy said it was okay. She didn't seem too upset, and we just let it go. No doctors or counselors were consulted, but over the years, all the way up into my twenties, whenever I had an

episode, I would tell her, “I was a little schizophrenic today,” and she would say, “It’s okay; you’re okay.” Deep down, though, I worried something was wrong with me. I was broken somehow, flawed. Certainly my mind, while I enjoyed using it, could not be controlled, could not be relied upon. When I learned later about what was then called multiple personality disorder, I worried that Panic and Scorn were real people who might stay longer, even take over my consciousness. What happened to people who had multiple personalities? Didn’t they get taken away, have to live in a hospital forever? What if you were just a little kid? I didn’t even like to leave home for the grocery store. I hated day care and the doctor’s office. I figured hospitals were both at the same time. I couldn’t imagine growing up in a place like that—I pushed it out of my mind.

I understand now that dissociation is not an uncommon coping mechanism among children in response to trauma. What’s less clear is why I had such a strong trauma response when nothing terribly bad had happened to me yet. The violent traumas of my life were still to come.

From first to fourth grades I went to Bush Hill Elementary, where my mother worked in a physical, occupational, and speech therapy wing and children with various handicaps were integrated into regular classes as much as possible. I rode with Mommy back and forth from home, and helped the teachers and visited with the librarian before and after school. I read books and played with all the fun toys in the therapy wing, and flew down the empty halls on the tricycles and wheelchairs that lived in special alcoves by Mommy’s office. The occupational therapists had super-cool stuff like silly putty and a big block covered with cloth that had different closures all over it, so you could practice zipping and lacing and tying and buckling. There was also a big closet I went into sometimes, which was full of mats and blow-up balls. I would take a nap on the mats or make a fort and hide in there to read or think.

I liked having quiet time to myself before and after school. And I liked helping the other teachers stay organized or make mimeo copies, or cut out letters to go on a bulletin board. During reading, I either went up to the class two grades ahead, or visited the principal, Mr. Walters, and read to him aloud. He was my favorite person in the building and he made me feel like I was his favorite, too. He kept a jar of jelly beans on his desk, and I don't know anyone else who got to eat them besides me. The first week, a boy in my class brought a lighter to school. He came up behind me on the playground and lit it, right next to my cheek. I ran off to tell the teacher, who told Mr. Walters and the boy was expelled. I never saw him again.

Even though Mommy was just down the hall, and the teachers and staff were kind, I was a pretty shy kid, so much so that I was nervous every day in the first grade. It was hard to be surrounded by so many people, strangers, all of a sudden, to have strange people look at me, maybe even say something to me. I was nervous of Mrs. Savage, the teacher's aide, mostly because her name was "Savage." I was nervous of sixth graders, mostly because they were big. I was also nervous of the cafeteria. I found it hard to eat in front of other people. And the scariest part of the cafeteria was the lunch ladies—tall women in strange robes and hairnets, who stood behind a counter so high I couldn't see over it.

Another thing I was nervous of was the bathrooms. There were two bathrooms—one in the back of our classroom, and one down the hall. Anyone who had to use the bathroom during school either had to go in the back of the classroom where everyone could hear you pee, or had to walk down the big hallway by yourself into the big bathroom with six big stalls where anybody might be waiting, including Mrs. Savage or a sixth grader. And, to be able even to do that, I would have to raise my hand, and ask the teacher out loud to be excused to the bathroom. Which I could never do. So I brought my lunch every day to avoid the lunch ladies, and I didn't drink all day—no milk or juice or water—so I wouldn't have to pee.

Besides dissociation and general social isolation, my primary tool for coping with stress became restricting food and drink. As far back as I can remember, and all the way up to the day I write this sentence, I find it difficult to eat when I'm under any kind of pressure. I delay or skip meals; I go blank when I need to choose food; I have a hard time digesting what I do eat. Whether I'm looking at my own fridge or pantry, aisles of the supermarket, a restaurant menu, or a city full of restaurant options, I tend to blank out. Sometimes when I eat, I can't taste anything.

My mother doesn't much like to eat, really. She eats enough to be healthy, but not a lot, and she doesn't enjoy it all that much. So I didn't enjoy food much, either. It was a sort of semi-subconscious policy of mine never to clean my plate, maybe because there was so much pressure to finish all my food. I always left just one bite, just a small one. Even when my parents took me to McDonald's for a Cheeseburger Happy Meal, which was a special treat that happened maybe once a year, I would leave one tiny bite of cheeseburger on the open paper wrapper.

We didn't have a big food budget, so there were leftovers a lot. Basically, Mommy or Papi would cook a big pot of rice and beans, or a casserole, and we would eat on it for several days, or we would cook on the weekend, and freeze things, and reheat them during the week. I didn't mind leftovers necessarily, but I did have a very sensitive system and a nervous stomach, so if I'd had an upset stomach the night before, I sure wouldn't want the same food again the next day. A few times, I was told that if I didn't eat what was given me, it would be all I would get the next day. I resisted with everything I had, which was a lot of stubborn will-power and a lot of meal-skipping skill. I could hold out for at least twenty-four hours, maybe forty-eight. Eventually, they would back down and give me something else to eat, in exchange for a few bites of the days-old meal.

I got my first job when I was eight years old. I'd been at Bush Hill two years and was getting a little bored in the hours before and after the school day when Mommy was working. There was a public library about three blocks away, and Mommy started dropping me off there in the mornings. I became a library page, probably one of the youngest ever. I shelved and alphabetized; I stamped due dates on due date cards. One day, I got to take a wet rag and a small tub of wintergreen-smelling pale pink paste and *wash* books! Well, that's what they called it, but it only involved my wiping hard-bound books with the paste until they were clean. Not just the children's books, either—I had my own rolling stool and I worked my way through the young adult section. I found it all quite satisfying. I loved having simple tasks and a role, a job title. I loved being a helper, something my mother always said it was important to be.

I didn't feel worried at all when I was in the library. I felt safe and calm, even happy. It was bright with natural light, clean and quiet. The books and magazines felt like friends. But I had to leave my page job when I transferred to Springfield Estates Elementary for fifth grade.

Springfield Estates was a magnet program. In my fifth-grade class, there were kids who spent time doing calculus and writing computer programs for Apple and Atari. I got to take violin classes during the day. I got to spend time rewriting Shakespeare into modern English. I also started playing and sometimes singing with the high school orchestra. And I found that even though I loved performing, I was usually nervous before lessons, and even more so before rehearsals and performances. When I was nervous, it felt like my stomach was turning over and over, or like I had to go to the bathroom, which, of course, I didn't like to do at school. So I just decided not to eat lunch on the days I had violin lessons or rehearsals or performances.

One of my favorite family activities was driving to Burke Lake state park to watch community softball games. When there were open diamonds, we would practice hitting and throwing and catching with Wiffle bats and Nerf softballs. In the evenings, though, all the diamonds would be full of grown-

ups playing. And part of the fun of going to watch baseball was sharing a popcorn or a lemonade with Papí. Or boxes of Cracker Jacks, because he would eat the peanuts at the bottom of my box, and always let me keep both my prize and his. Or ice cream, because he would lick the sides of the cone when it was drippy. But walking the twenty yards, alone, to the concession window and talking to the person behind the counter and asking him for food was impossible. When I tried, I sometimes made it halfway through the line, but then I would get so nervous knowing it was almost my turn to place my order, I would sneak away, and just tell my father they were out of popcorn or lemonade or whatever we had wanted.

If my father came along, *maybe* I could do it. Papí had a way of making people smile, relax, of making them like him. I didn't feel I had any such power, even though most people did smile when they saw me, and most people did like me. Sometimes Papí would go to the snack bar for me and bring back popcorn or lemonade. Sometimes he would go with me and hold my hand, talk to the concession worker on my behalf. "We'll take one of your finest boxes of Cracker Jacks, please." Make them smile.

But sometimes when I wanted a snack, he would only hand me a dollar and say, "Sure. Here you go—get whatever you want. We'll share." And if I said, "I don't want to go by myself," he would take the dollar back and say, "Well, I guess you don't really want those Cracker Jacks after all."

Papí's family was mostly in New York City and could rarely afford to visit or call us. We tried to drive up to visit once every other Christmas or so. Mom's family we left behind in Oregon, and through my whole childhood, not one of them ever came to visit us. There weren't even phone calls, which were expensive in those days. From Mom's side, we got cards and boxes at Christmas and birthdays. I didn't really have friends. I had colleagues—at school, in the orchestra, and on the soccer team. My parents weren't very curious about my thoughts and feelings. We sat down to dinner together

every night, where they asked what I'd learned in school that day. The bedtime routine was Mommy tucking me in, reading me poems or a story. There were no other people in my life, peers or grown-ups, who were emotionally available; no one was present to help me when my experience became so stressful that I stopped eating or drinking except at home. I started writing my own poems when I was five, mostly to play with words and images, but also, I think, to process my feelings of sadness, anger, and isolation. I had nowhere else to put them.

By the age of ten, I effectively had my own life. I left the house at seven every morning and walked three blocks to catch a 7:15 school bus on which I served as a safety patrol officer. I made sure students got on and off the bus safely and stayed quietly seated on board. (Our driver was a blonde woman named Diane who kept a small television set on the dashboard and watched soaps during the afternoon return trips. I knew *that* wasn't safe, but had no idea what to do about it.) Then I had school, often a violin lesson midday, which I had to remember and watch the time and get myself to. Then either a bus ride home or orchestra practice at the high school, or soccer practice, from which Mommy would pick me up and bring me home for dinner. In my own time, I read novels, poems and plays, the dictionary, the World Book encyclopedias, and organized and reorganized my rock collection, sometimes by type—metamorphic, igneous, sedimentary—sometimes alphabetically, sometimes by color, dark to light.

It seemed to me that the job of a child was to be obedient, to meet the expectations of adults. If anyone said, "should," you should. If anyone said, "have to," or "next, we're going to," you swallowed your fear, pressed down your distress, and complied. And when I sang, people said, "Oh, you should sing at my church," "You should be on Broadway," "Oh, she has to be a soloist in our next show." I came to believe that my music was a thing, a commodity, something others could demand of me. I came to believe that I had to accept requests to perform whether I wanted to or not.

And if I did not go to Broadway/make a record/sing opera one day, I would have failed, and wasted my talent.

So I played with the orchestra and sang in the choir. Sometimes I sang solos at the junior high or high school. I did love performing, but going somewhere foreign like Wolf Trap, or a school full of older kids, gave me butterflies in my stomach, and not in a good way. I wouldn't be able to eat or drink all day if I had a violin lesson during school or a performance after. No way would I risk throwing up or having "the runs" in the middle of practice. The more I had to handle on my own, the greater my eating distress, and the more I relied on restriction as a coping skill.

Mommy and Papí were fairly isolated, too. They didn't socialize much. They were clear and consistent in prioritizing time spent as a family—weeknight dinners, weekend chores, outdoor hikes and fishing trips to nearby parks. We went to all the Smithsonian museums. But a lot of our family time was spent at home, cooking and baking, building furniture, gardening, playing games, and, always, reading and making music. For at least an hour or two every day, we would sit down and have silent reading time, in addition to read-aloud time with Mommy before bed, sometimes replaced by story-telling time with Papí. Papí was one of those storytellers who when you asked him, "Tell me a story?" would usually start with, "Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Olga-Maria..."

My Papí was Franklin Delano Cruz, a bass-baritone who sang under the name of Francisco Cruz-Sandoval. He and Mommy met in San Francisco in 1971, where he was singing with the San Francisco Opera and she was studying physical therapy at UCSF. No recordings of him exist so far as I know, but his singing voice was fairly similar to that of Ettore Bastianini, and when he talked he sounded a little like James Earl Jones or Paul Robeson, and he looked like a pinker version of Muhammad Ali. He had that warm, African-American timbre that is so hard to describe in words. Suffice it to say, he could bring down the house with "Ol' Man River," one of those songs that sounds

more than a little ridiculous when a white person tries to sing it. He stopped touring and singing professionally when I was born, but he sang a lot around the house—loud and resonant, so the whole neighborhood could hear. I was never embarrassed. I was proud. They were lucky to get a free concert.

Papí was also always playing and listening to recordings. He had a sizable record collection, in maybe a dozen languages; mostly classical but ranging to folk, or even French pop songs. Richard Harris, Pete Seeger, Jacques Brel, Nana Mouskouri. Sometimes I'd be running through the living room and he'd reach out and stop me—"Come here. Sit down. You have to listen to this. You're going to sing this someday."

Around the age of nine, I developed an interest in certain aspects of the paranormal. I read up on ghosts and the Bermuda Triangle and Ouija boards and psychic abilities, and became convinced that I had ESP. Specifically, I could send and receive telepathic messages. I even designed a science fair project to test my theory. Every night for a week, at exactly 8:00 pm, I would "send" a "message" to my partner and then, at 8:05, she would send me one back. We each made a chart of what we sent and what we thought we received. The messages were simple, visual images of a geometric shape in a primary color—red, yellow, blue; circle, triangle, square—nine possibilities. Our results were inconclusive, but did seem to indicate that I was stronger at sending than receiving telepathic information. My personal conclusion was that I was really only psychic with Papí. And my theory about *that* was that the two of us could read each other's minds and emotions because we were so alike and because we understood and loved one another so deeply.

I don't remember the first time Papí and I communicated without talking—I don't remember the fourth or the tenth—but after a certain point it was just an acknowledged thing in the family. One evening, Mom and Coop and I were home, Papí was on his way back from work, and Mom realized we were out of milk. "Olga-Maria," she said, "tell your father to bring home a gallon of milk." I went

and sat on the couch and focused my mind. I visualized the big red S sign of the Safeway grocery store. I visualized the dairy case, the gallon jugs, and said in my head, “Milk, Papi. Milk, milk, milk. Bring home milk.” I visualized him coming through the front door with a gallon of milk, and a few minutes later, there he was. “I heard we needed milk,” he said.

What I can’t understand is why he didn’t automatically know when I was suffering. As connected as we were, why didn’t he know that day, when the boy who sat behind me in school turned and shoved his hard, plastic ruler between me and my chair and moved it fast, front to back, until it burned me? I didn’t even know how to talk about that incident. I had no words for what was happening to me. I felt violated—this boy was touching what I had been taught were private parts, but it wasn’t his hand, or another part of his body. He wasn’t exposing himself; he had a tool. Did that make it worse, or not so bad? I had never heard of this sort of behavior. It had never crossed my mind such a thing might occur to anyone, let alone me. I had no idea why it was happening then, what it was supposed to accomplish. It seemed that he simply decided to take power over my body, because I was a girl, and he felt like asserting his dominance.

In the years to come I would experience similar and far worse violence a dozen more times, from male friends, boyfriends, strangers. I would find ways to speak up, to fight back, or at least to speak out and report the abuse. At age ten, though, I simply froze, and flushed, and raged inside. I told no one. I did hope someone would notice, or ask. I hoped my father might pick up on my psychic vibrations, how unhappy and ashamed I was, how uncomfortable I became in my body, not just because it was changing with puberty, but because it seemed to invite harassment like this. I came home every day hoping my mother or father might ask how I was feeling about playing violin at such high stakes, how I felt about my bus ride, about being so far from them so much of the day. I don’t know why it was hard for them to ask, instead of what I learned in school that day, what had made me excited or happy, what had made me frustrated or disappointed or embarrassed, if anything had

scared me, intimidated me, if I ever felt overwhelmed. Maybe it simply never occurred to them to talk about feelings. But I had so many, and they were big.

Katie Session

The thing is, everybody has Parts, not just trauma survivors. Everyone experiences at least mixed feelings, and will say something like:

“Well, part of me wants to go, but part of me just wants to stay home.”

“Part of me wants to trust him and part of me is shouting, *No, run away!*”

In trauma, Parts get stuck in time, and become harder to access. Hurting Parts get shut down or frozen, and protective Parts get activated. In what we now call Dissociative Identity Disorder, Parts develop not just functions but independent lives, and the core Self loses time when one or another Part takes over. When I was a child, DID was one of my greatest fears. Some of my younger Parts are scared of it still. But although my dissociative experiences were scary then and can be irritating now, they are not that extreme. Katie says I am at a higher risk for DID if I were to go through another major trauma, but she also says that even DID is a wonderful, amazing coping mechanism. It would hold all the pain in different containers, and let me feel only a small amount at any one time, until life got a little easier. DID can keep a person alive.

Everyone has experienced some level of dissociation. You zone out during a conversation; you get so tired that parts of the room seem to grow smaller and other parts larger; you enter the world of a play, a book, or a film, and it becomes real for a brief time. Part of you knows you're you, sitting in a chair, and another part becomes a citizen of revolutionary France or Middle-Earth. There is a continuum, a spectrum, from daydreaming and suspension of disbelief, to trauma Parts, to a splitting off of full personalities. Everyone has various elements to her personality that show up at different times, as needed. We channel our compassion when someone else is hurting, our perseverance when challenges arise.

One friend I've told about this work (they are few—it is so intense and sounds so strange) said she thought of it as if I were a haunted place, and my counseling sessions were séances. It's not a bad metaphor. Though I have no experience of ghosts, I think it may well be similar, living in a haunted house and living in my body. The Parts can be disruptive and inconvenient. Often they come forward when I'm feeling relaxed and comfortable, which makes sense psychologically—we are better able to deal with traumatic memories and the aftereffects of traumatic events when we're feeling stronger—but I don't *want* to be choked with grief in the middle of a yoga class. I have a hard time getting to sleep without Parts rising up, looking for connection. Most nights I try to lose myself in a novel or a movie, someone else's story.

Recently, Katie and I encountered a very young Part who uses a similar technique. Little Mushki is around two. She lives in Oregon and Papí is gone a lot. She is really weepy. She wants to cuddle with Mommy on the sofa. She wants Papí to send postcards every day, to call her on the phone every night. She wants ice cream and her blankie, because she wants to feel Papí's love like a warm blanket to curl around her. Mushki loves stories, she says, "because then it's Piglet who is scared and Eeyore who is sad, and Rabbit who is angry." Instead of her.

"Where would she like to go, where she could be happy, right now?" Katie asks. I sent the question down into the Mushki-pain at my heart center.

"Kanga's house," the answer comes back.

"What a good choice," Katie says.

Of course. Kanga, so nurturing, gentle and strong at the same time, with that safe, snuggly pouch any little one might like to hide in.

CHAPTER TWO

Just as I was starting to feel that I had friends at my new school, or that the boys I liked might someday like me, my parents announced we were moving again. At the end of the school year, we relocated from Alexandria, Virginia to Dade City, Florida, a small town of dairy farms and orange groves an hour north of Tampa. Papí had found a teaching gig at a smaller Catholic college nearby, and the cost of living was so low we could afford to buy a home instead of renting. The town was mostly pine scrub and live oaks hanging with Spanish moss, which I found creepy, especially once I learned that it is full of tiny bugs. There were also fire ants, so named because they bite, and their venom feels like fire and makes a small, pustulant sore that burns for days. The town had (and still has) only a dozen or so small shops, a handful of fast food franchises, two grocery chain stores and a Wal-Mart. Two elementary schools, one junior high, one high school: Alexandria it was not. The nearest shopping mall was forty-five minutes away. Violin lessons were over for me.

Probably the most startling and disturbing difference between DC and Dade City (the irony struck me right away) was the palpable class and racial tension. This was a town where black folk literally lived on the other side of the tracks, and where there was a sizable transitory population of migrant farm workers, whose children worked and travelled along with their parents, completely disrupting their schooling. Papí, who worked for racial justice wherever he went, pointed out a diner just a few blocks from our house as a KKK meeting place. Then he explained who they were.

It was also a town where nearly every family went to church. On Dade City's Church Street, the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist churches sit side by side. The Catholics and Episcopalians meet on the other side of Main Street. There are no synagogues. The AME Zion (translation, black)

church is across the tracks. Papí took me across the tracks once, to a community barbeque where we were the only white people. But that was confusing, too, because my father was a very light-skinned black man. But the black kids at school wouldn't talk to me. There were none in my (upper-level, college prep) classes; I encountered them in PE, at lunch, in the hallways. I'd had black friends in Virginia from day one of first grade, but black and white did not mix socially here, and the black girls made it clear to me. They spoke a different English than I had heard before, stood aggressively close, called me "white girl." I knew I was really a light-colored Puerto Rican girl. Black boys wouldn't even make eye contact.

Fights broke out at school on an almost daily basis, mostly between individual boys, in between classes. The violence shocked and viscerally upset me. I'd never heard of children physically hurting one another on purpose. Worse was the enjoyment other students seemed to get from watching—"Fight! Fight!" the call would go out—it wasn't a shout of encouragement to the participants, but a call to everyone else to gather around. Not to break it up, but to watch the spectacle. I rejected such spectatorship on principle. "Ignore them and they'll go away." Wasn't that what Mom and every other teacher and grown-up had told me, over and over? Wasn't that the only proper response to bullying? After a few minutes, a male teacher would step in and break up the fight and send those involved to the principal's office, where they would both likely get paddled. Violence to stop the violence.

I was eventually able to make some friends by a method that was new to me. I don't remember how it happened, if someone asked and I told them I sang, or if someone heard me humming or singing to myself, but I became, "Olga, that girl who sings—sing, Olga!" As a singer, I became beloved; as a scholar, I was highly successful. But good grades didn't win you any friends in this neighborhood. I was not invited to parties, to movies out. Just church. It was definitely hard to eat at school, even harder than before. There were more people at junior high than elementary school, and, because I was new, even more strangers. But suddenly, it wasn't cool to bring your lunch. For that whole year of

seventh grade, I couldn't go through the lunch line at all: I sent money with a friend and waited at the table. By high school, I could go through the line, but I usually only got one or two things, and only if at least two friends went with me.

I was fourteen when my father died, suddenly, in the night, of a heart attack. It was a school day, in February 1986. He had come home early from a conference to give Mommy a birthday present, and had left his blood pressure medication back in his Orlando hotel room. My eight-year-old brother, Cooper, and I slept right through the ambulance lights and sirens, the paramedics racing into our parents' bedroom to try to resuscitate him. I woke up at my normal time, to my alarm clock at 7:15, and felt something eerie about the house. It was spotless. My mother had been cleaning for hours, preparing for the onslaught of funeral guests. I found her furiously polishing the piano.

Mom? What's going on?

Your father's dead. And you can't cry because then I'll cry, and I can't cry right now. We have to go tell your brother.

So I didn't cry. My job was to help her. My role in the family had always been to be a helper, but it was clear to me that I had to become far more adult, right away. Mommy needed me.

As the day wore on, the house began to fill with flowers, and food, and people. My piano teacher brought a homemade lemon pound cake. It was the only thing I could actually taste. I remember trays of cold cuts, fruit baskets, casseroles. Mom explained that it is common practice to feed the grieving, because they often lose their appetites, can't focus enough to plan and cook actual meals. They also frequently have guests, who stay for hours, and likewise need to eat. It was certainly true in our case, because Papi had been the real cook in the family. It slowly dawned on me that we

would never eat *paella* or *ropa vieja* or black beans and rice again, unless I learned how to make them. For now, at least, there was plenty of small-town, home-cooked comfort food, and more shiny, beautiful fruit than I'd seen outside a grocery store.

The sweetest and most thoughtful gift was from Jill and Brian, my two best friends from school. We sat together in almost every class, every year, alphabetically: Burks, Crutcher, Cruz. They came by the house with a big, soft, grey and white stuffed dog with white and yellow daisies tied around his neck with yellow ribbon. Suddenly, fourteen was not at all too grown-up for stuffed animals. I needed something to squeeze, to hold over the black hole that had opened up in my chest; something big enough to root me to the earth when I felt so empty I might drift away.

The funeral was a blur. I remember it being pretty full, the room at the funeral home full of blurry people shaking my hand and offering me sympathy. Only one schoolmate came that I recall. I wouldn't have called her a friend. She was probably the most religious of everyone I knew, belonged to some small ultra-conservative group, always wore long dresses. Since I was the *least* religious person I knew, I figured she was there to make some sort of point, but she seemed genuinely sad for me, even though she'd never met my father. Everyone else was a colleague of his, a student or former student, colleagues and friends of Mom's and awkwardly few family members.

Titi Alicia came, Pop's older sister, who lived in Queens. No one from Mom's family came at any point to support this thirty-nine-year-old widow with two children. Strangest and most difficult were the man and woman who showed up with their spouses, saying they were our brother and sister. I knew, though maybe Cooper hadn't yet been told, that Papí had been married before, and had two children—a girl and a boy, Danilia and Dimitri. They had the same birth order and spacing as we did, five years apart; they were twenty-nine and twenty-four, and they looked just like us.

Dimitri brought a childhood photo that looked so much like Cooper he was disconcerted because he couldn't remember where it was taken. Danilia and I had on the exact same shade of pearl

nail polish, on hands that looked eerily alike. She sat by me at dinner the night they first arrived, and she decided to give me one of her rings. When she slipped the gold and topaz on my finger, my hand turned into her hand, like a magic trick.

There was no viewing, and no real ceremony—no readings, no prayers or songs. “Franklin Delano Cruz” went up on a small plaque on a mausoleum wall. We didn’t even have a photo of Papí at the funeral home where we received condolences. I simply never saw him again. At the time, I was grateful to be spared the gruesome sight of his corpse. Over the years, I have come to feel quite differently. I have had intense dreams, off and on, that my father is still alive. Sometimes I have had to ask my husband or my mother what is true because I wake up so terribly confused. I think that if I had been forced to see him dead then, I wouldn’t still be subject to these dreams.

At first, my dreams fell into a classic pattern of the denial phase—Papí was still alive, with us, everything just as normal. Then as I came to accept his death, moving on to anger and grief, those dreams shifted and faded. In graduate school, though, they resurfaced, with a darker twist. Papí was in hiding from bad guys, he was in the witness protection program; he came to visit me, now that I lived far from home. He felt terrible for leaving without saying goodbye.

I went back to school the day after the funeral. I decided to dress in all black for a while. My parents hadn’t done that for their parents, and as far as I knew it was a fairly outdated tradition I had learned about in books, but it made complete sense to me. Color and brightness felt all wrong, stripes and patterns too loud. I was bereaved; I was bereft, and I wanted everyone to be able to see it. I had no energy for putting together the cute outfits expected of a high school freshman. I could reach for black, and I continued to, for a full year. So, I would be the Sad Girl. So what. Let it show.

Spring was track season and I’d missed a week of practice. There was no girls’ soccer league in our area, so I had moved on to dance and running. I wasn’t very good at either, but they were good

for me, building strength and flexibility, even a little grace, into my adolescent body. Track practice happened every day after school, and I looked forward to running out my feelings, re-finding that runner's high I sometimes got a few miles in. I was shocked and embarrassed to find that I couldn't even make it once around that track—my body just wouldn't go. It seemed like the empty heaviness in my torso had spread to my arms and legs. I had nothing. I had to quit. I apologized to the coaches and numbly walked away.

It took everything I had just to focus in my classes. Actually, I didn't focus. School was ridiculously easy for me. The only class I struggled with was advanced geometry. When finals came around, I worried to Mom that I couldn't study, my brain was a fog. I kept falling asleep. She gave me permission not to study at all for my finals—all I had to do was take them. My grades were so strong, even if I failed the exam. So I let myself off the hook, just that once. Without studying, I made a C on the exam and a B+ in the course. Done. Moving on.

I started dissociating more after Papí died, and in different ways. I floated up to the ceiling sometimes when I was at the piano and watched myself play. I would float above and behind myself as I walked down the corridors at the high school. In photos from the next two years, I look pretty, but absent, vague. Inside, I felt literally shattered, in a way that was both physical and not physical. Today, I understand better the Eastern notion of the body-mind, chakra centers—that one's love energy resides in the heart center, power and courage in the gut, and so on. It seemed to me that when I felt around inside myself, in my torso, I was all broken up in little pieces, even that the pieces had been scattered and blown far away. I knew I had to try to absorb the blow, and pick up those pieces, pull myself back together. But I couldn't conceive of how to begin. I couldn't find them.

Mommy put me in grief counseling right away, but I didn't want to talk. We tried three different practices, but all the therapists seemed awkward and dumb. They asked dumb questions like,

“Did you love your Dad?” and, “Where do you think he is right now?” and, “How do you feel about that?” “Are you angry at God for letting him die?” I would just stare at the wall and wonder how they ever earned those fancy diplomas. My father was dead, he was in a jar because he was just ashes now, and obviously it felt really, really bad. Who would be happy? And he wasn’t my “Dad,” he was *Papí*. But the counselors didn’t deserve to know that. How could they ask me “did” I love him? I *do* love him. Do, do, do, do, do. I wasn’t angry, I was so, so sad. I was so sad I couldn’t talk. I didn’t have words. I was so sad, I could barely move. I feel badly, looking back, for wasting their time, but I spent most of my therapeutic hours staring at patterns in carpet fibers.

One counselor told us that I needed to cry, and that he would contact my school to make sure I had permission to leave class at any time and a quiet place to let the tears flow. Mom thought that was “malarkey.” “When you’re at school, you need to focus on school.” So I never let myself cry there, either.

Mom went to counseling, too; her sessions were right after mine. She had started having panic attacks, though she didn’t tell me about it, and we didn’t really have that language at the time. All I knew was, she had trouble driving and had to keep the windows down and the heater off so she could concentrate. Cooper and I shivered with the winter wind in our faces and stayed very quiet. One night, a few weeks after the funeral, Mommy walked out of the house and drove away, without saying goodbye, without saying where she was going or when she’d be back. Coop and I looked at each other. We were both struck at the same moment. What if she *didn’t* come back?

“It’ll be okay,” I told him. “I’ll take care of you,” I said. “We could go and live with Aunt Kathy.” Mom’s sister lived in Oregon, and had never visited us, not even for the funeral. We kept looking at each other, tacitly understanding what this meant. Mom would probably come back, but we had to be extra good. We had to keep her.

She'd tried before and failed, but Mommy stopped smoking for good the day Pop died, and I started cursing. I felt entitled; I deserved a good swear. Life had handed me a raw deal and I had to vent somehow. Respectable folk did not curse in Dade City. I also started abusing painkillers. Nothing illegal, obviously. I was and am the good-est of good girls. Just over-the-counter meds: Tylenol, ibuprofen, and something called Percogesic. The package said, "For enhanced relief of pain." I figured that was just what I needed. I started taking double and triple the adult dose, just to numb out.

Sometimes my body would numb itself, with no help from me. I slept a lot in the afternoons. I fainted quite a few times, especially when I forgot to eat, which happened a lot, or when I had some extra stressor in my life. I think that, beyond my regular eating distress, I was especially disconnected from my body at that point, and just not in touch with my hunger. When I did eat, nothing tasted good. I've been learning recently that all the napping and fainting and numbing was part of a very strong and natural trauma response called hypo-arousal.

The fight-or-flight response is hyper-arousal, where adrenaline floods the nervous system: the heart races, the legs might shake, palms sweat, head pounds. But the fight and flight options are only useful when the body can move, and there is a chance of escape. When trauma is inescapable, the nervous system moves into hypo-arousal—the adrenaline needed for fighting or fleeing is shut off, the body is immobilized or numbed as emotional and cognitive functions are disrupted. In these situations, trauma survivors say things like, "I couldn't move," "I couldn't think," "My heart stopped," "I couldn't breathe," "I thought I was going to pass out." Memories of episodes of hyper-arousal tend to be strong and vivid; memories from episodes of hypo-arousal tend to be foggy or nonexistent. Now that I'm aware of it, I notice that hypo-arousal happens to me when I get overwhelmed, thinking or talking about certain emotional memories. Sometimes it happens when I am grocery shopping or making decisions about food. My mind feels foggy and goes blank; my breath gets shallow; I start to

feel like I'm going to fall asleep. When it happens in counseling, my therapist talks to me, bringing me back to a more neutral place so that I can stay present.

I struggled with hypo-arousal after my father's death, because my body-mind was overwhelmed with shock and grief, but I was also suffering from major depression. The awful fact was that I didn't want to be alive. Without Papí, I felt I had no one who could understand me or share my interests—stuck as I was in this backwater little town, left with my un-artistic mother who didn't even *listen* to music, much less make it. Cooper wasn't musical; he wasn't even an enthusiastic reader at that point, and he was too young to be a friend to me. He seemed relatively unfazed by our father's death. He kept calm and carried on, being active and outdoorsy, everything Mommy could hope for. I spent all day every day trying to keep myself from falling to pieces, for the two of them. If they hadn't needed me or if I hadn't felt they did, I would absolutely have ended my life at fourteen. As it was, I did try, once.

It was the night before I was to take the SAT. I must have been sixteen by then, but inside, I felt exactly the same as I had in February 1986. My grief had not resolved at all, really. I still felt that life without my father, life in a universe where beloved fathers could disappear overnight, was not worth slogging through. I was under what seemed at the time to be a tremendous amount of pressure at school, mostly from teachers who wanted me to perform feats of academic brilliance on the SAT. Somehow, it was common knowledge that my verbal score would be near-perfect, and also that my math score would not be. Walking down the halls, I would be exhorted by various teachers, leaning out their classroom doors:

“Olga-Maria! You working on your math?”

“Olga-Maria? How's that math coming along?”

Already a bit of a perfectionist, and deeply aware since the fourth grade (long division) and fifth grade (fractions) that math was not my strong suit, I was embarrassed that other people, grown-ups, teachers, were expecting some sort of huge leap of progress from me—on one Saturday morning, on a national exam. What if I choked?

I didn't want to let anyone down, let my school down. I really didn't want to let myself down. I had to be amazing. In my mind, I was competing not against my current classmates but against the superstars of Springfield Estates. I hadn't measured up at age eleven, and I was sure to have fallen behind over the past five years. And I needed all the scholarship money I could get. It was too much to face. I took a whole bottle of Percogesic before bed. I didn't leave a note.

Percogesic bottles are particularly small. I was disappointed to wake up the next morning, and disconcerted to find my eyes not working at all. I got up, shut off the alarm, and groped my way to the bathroom. I switched on the lights, but saw only darkness. Trying not to panic, I just moved forward with my morning routine: I pulled off my clothes, turned on the shower, blind, and then collapsed on the floor, unconscious.

My mother heard me fall, came in, and pulled me so that my head was lower than my heart. She turned the shower all the way to cold and held my upper body under the water. I came to again, gasping. No SAT for me that day.

Percogesic is essentially Tylenol plus Benadryl, which is an antihistamine with strong sedative properties. Side effects include low blood sugar, which leads to fatigue, drowsiness, dizziness, fainting, and, at high doses, blurred vision. It took a few hours for my eyesight to return, longer for Mommy to recover from those ten or so minutes when she thought her daughter had killed herself. Still longer for me to understand how important I was to her, and to forgive myself for putting her through that. We moved forward, carefully, treating each other with more gentleness and gratitude. We said, "I love you," more frequently. I promised myself I would try harder, try not to worry her.

My role in the family shifted significantly as I grew into my older teens. I took on more adult responsibilities: cooking, cleaning, laundry and ironing, dishes (by hand, we had no dishwasher), walking the dog. It became Cooper's job to set the table, to keep his own room tidy. Dade City is the seat of Pasco County. The elementary, middle, and high schools are all named "Pasco" and sit within blocks of each other. We lived on a dirt-road cul-de-sac just behind the middle school, and at that point, the ninth grade was part of the middle school. When my classes let out around two, I would go down to the elementary school to walk Cooper home. We could walk to the public library, to the local bakery (Olga's Bakery, established in 1972, like me) for a doughnut in the afternoon. But I couldn't help with driving Coop to soccer matches or getting groceries. Cars had always made me nervous and I was fearful about becoming a driver myself. I passed the written test on driving rules to get my learner's permit at age fifteen, but, as my mother would often say, "Your Papi was supposed to teach you to drive."

Lessons with Mom did not come easily. We practiced on the campus of the community college, which had simple roads and wide-open parking lots, but nothing I did seemed right to her or felt comfortable to me. Just putting the car in motion was enough to make my stomach lurch. I was sure I was going to cause some heinous accident and we would both die or become horribly maimed. Mom kept stamping her foot on an invisible brake on the passenger side and holding what we called the "Oh-shit handle." Driver's Ed classes at school went somewhat better. I broke a few cones learning to parallel park. I was not smooth changing lanes and terrified of merging. The worst part were the horrific films we had to watch about drunk driving. I worried about my mother driving to work and back, even though she'd never had an accident or even a parking ticket. It took me an extra year to get my driver's license. I could help with more errands, but I was still terribly anxious driving. Dade City is small and remote; it takes at least thirty minutes to an hour to get to the beach, the mall,

a bookstore, an independent restaurant, a movie. The airport. A Staples. Even today, I avoid driving as much as possible. My least favorite aspect of visiting Florida is all the driving.

Socially, I was not so much anxious as uncomfortable and so disconnected from myself (I understand now) that I had real trouble reading other people, empathizing with them or picking up clues as to their intentions or trustworthiness. I also had a very hard time discerning my own feelings and desires, let alone asserting myself in a social setting. I was a leader in the classroom, but when it came to making social plans, I was either a follower, or out of the loop altogether. And under stress, I tended toward hypo-arousal. This became a serious problem when I started dating.

There were two or three boys I liked, but they dated my friends. The boys who asked me out at fifteen, sixteen, were people I didn't know, a year or two ahead of me in school. We weren't friends. I wasn't interested. I wasn't interested in dating at all, really, but the expectations were strong that everyone should date, one-on-one, at our age, and have a partner, possibly even have sex with him. I didn't want to have sex, even with the boys I liked and wanted to like me. Holding hands and kissing was all I knew about and all I was interested in sharing in terms of physical contact. It seemed nice to have a big guy walk with his arm around your shoulder. The teen couples who walked with their hands in each other's back pockets were gross.

Some of my girl friends were having sex. Every year, a few girls dropped out to have babies, but not the girls in the college prep track. College-bound girls had abortions. Nobody talked about diseases. I was scared of diseases and pregnancy, on some level—I definitely thought sex outside of marriage was terribly risky. This was the era of the HIV epidemic, after all. There had been scarier movies in sex ed than in driver's ed. I made the decision to remain a virgin until marriage as soon as I learned about sex. Like a child, I thought it was kind of weird and disgusting, as was French kissing. Also, waiting for marriage was clearly the safest, wisest route, especially for a girl. Mainly, though, I had a strong moral intuition that sex outside of marriage was somehow wrong. It was a simple

syllogism. My understanding of marriage entailed fidelity. If you were promiscuous before marriage, how could your partner trust you to be faithful within the marriage? How could steadiness and self-control be part of your character if you'd never practiced them? I thought drinking was wrong, smoking was wrong, and that most movies and popular songs were morally corrupt and corrupting. Right and wrong were very important to me. Back in first grade, when lunch was fifty cents and milk was a nickel, my friend Lisa one day was scrounging around trying to put together ten cents for an ice cream. When she asked me if I had any spare change, I gave her my sternest look and said, "Lisa, if your mommy wanted you to have ice cream, she would have given you the money." I was a Good Girl. I was *the* Smart Girl. I was the Sad Girl. I was the Girl who Sang. That was the extent of my confirmed identity.

So I wasn't going to "sleep with" anyone; I wasn't ever going to think keg parties were fun. The boys I wanted to spend time with were taken. But I had to start dating sometime. I didn't want to turn sixteen without having "been kissed" (the passive construction troubles me now). I suppose it was inevitable that I would have my first date with someone I didn't even like and barely knew.

I had a friend, L, whose older brother was on the football team. He had a football friend, T, she said, who wanted to take me out. This guy was in my chemistry class; I'd never talked to him, but I guess he'd noticed me and decided he "liked" me. How could you be attracted to someone you didn't know? I had never understood the crushes my friends had on celebrities, or guys from other schools. Anyway, L told me this T was "a good guy," went to her church. He was smart, she said, though I'd seen no evidence of that in class. He looked like a big brute to me, your classic meathead. He was just quiet, L said. If he asked me out, would I say yes? I guessed so. T approached me a few days later and asked if I would go to a movie with him on Saturday night. I said yes and gave him my address so he could pick me up. He told me what time. End of conversation. I don't think either of us smiled.

If I had any idea of what to expect from a date, it had come from books like “Little Women” and “Nancy Drew.” I hadn’t grown up with television or movies, and the shows I had seen were wholesome—“Little House on the Prairie,” the “Star Wars” trilogy. We did have a TV set now, but we mostly watched baseball. The night of our date, T pulled up to the front of the house. He didn’t come in to meet my father because I didn’t have a father, and my mother didn’t seem curious to meet him. I got in his truck—a pale blue vintage Ford pickup so old it didn’t have seat belts. In hindsight, I think it was a sign, a message from the universe that this was not a safe place to be. We were headed to the drive-in. I didn’t know that was another bad sign—I thought it sounded quaint. The only drive-in movie I’d been to was “E.T.” with my family. T didn’t talk much on the way, just asked me to sit by him rather than by the window, so I did.

There were no concessions at the drive-in and the movie wasn’t anything I wanted to see—it was “Harry and the Hendersons,” some low-brow comedy involving a Sasquatch—and almost as soon as it started, T began molesting me. I suppose other girls would have known what to expect. Maybe this is what most first dates are like. Ever since the first grade, I had had crushes on boys and wanted them to kiss me on the cheek, sit by me at lunch, hold my hand in the hallway. T was taking off my bra and groping my breasts, putting his tongue in my mouth. I knew this was French kissing. It had always sounded gross to me. I tried to do with my tongue what he was doing, but I started crying. Then I couldn’t stop crying and after a while, T took me home. We tried again the next week and the next; I thought I would get used to it or something. But T kept pushing further, taking off my top, and jamming his hand in my pants, which again would make me cry. Eventually, my lack of enthusiasm for any sexual activity cooled T’s interest in me and he stopped asking me out. That was great with me. I was done with dating.

July 12, 2014

Katie Session

Katie has been to some new trainings. She wants me to develop more inner resources. Katie explains that everyone has the equivalent of an inner mother and father, and these “Resources” are elements of their own highest selves. Can I connect with a memory of myself being nurturing? I immediately think of the yoga studio where I work, how it feels to be walking up and down the room, teaching, touching my students, affirming their efforts. Katie encourages me to feel around inside that memory—I find calm, gladness, security. I feel my bare feet on the cork floor, sense friends around me.

Okay, Katie says: my “yoga teacher self” will be my shorthand for my inner Nurturer. Now, I need to make contact with a memory of myself being protective.

This takes a little longer, but I summon up the image of sitting by a little boy whom I love, refusing to allow anything or anyone to hurt him. Now we have my Protector. Together with my current self, I have three Resources to help my Parts as an ideal parent would do.

Part 1 Today there is a young Part at the forefront. She is very scared, and unhappy. She wants to hide where no one can see her. Katie gives me the “tappers” and I work on breathing deeper. Katie directs the Part to look to her right, where she is, and see if there’s somebody there. Yes, she says, surprised. There is. Standing over to the right of the smallish room where the little Part is huddled is someone wearing a big, black monster costume.

“It’s a gorilla monster,” she tells Katie.

“Is it scary?” Katie asks.

Oh, yes.

“Well,” Katie says, “one thing we can do to help it not be so scary, is we can put a thick glass wall up between us and the monster. That way, it can’t get to us, but we can still look at it, and talk to it.”

The little Part is not sure. “Why would we want to do that?” she wonders.

Katie says, “Because—and I know this may sound surprising—this ‘monster’ is another Part.”

Will it be a really thick wall?

Yes, Katie says, so thick no one could get through it, not even a really strong monster.

Part 2

Guarded by the wall of glass, Part 1 starts to talk with this new Part. It turns out that she wears the costume and the tall head so as to be full, grown-up size, but the Part is not full-size; she’s six or so. Katie asks about her job. Her job is to wear this outfit and to be scary. She works to make sure the little ones stay in line, not to upset Mommy and Papí. “Be careful!” she says to them, over and over.

“Be careful!”

“Be careful, or else!”

“Or else what?” Katie wants to know. Suddenly there’s an intense stomach ache.

“And how does this Part feel about doing this job?” Katie asks.

The Part does not like the job she is doing; none of the other parts likes her because she’s scary.

“Would she like to do something else?” Katie asks. “Would maybe she like to take off the mask she’s been wearing?”

Absolutely. The little Part is excited to take off the mask, leave the costume behind, and go outside to play. Before she goes, Katie asks her to look to her right, and see if anyone is there. And there is, again.

Part 3 is a very little Part, just a baby, or a toddler. She doesn't have many words. She does have a terrible stomach ache, a deep line of pain and pressure right at the top of the gut.

Katie asks if the stomach pain is linked to anything, if it goes outside the body.

Yes—there's something like a rope that goes out of the body.

Where does it go? Katie asks. Does it go to a place? To a person?

“It goes to Mommy and Papi.” Does it go to a place on their bodies? Yes. The Part is weeping. “Their faces. She loves their smiling faces.” This Part is only a baby, around one year old. She feels responsible for her parents' moods and feelings. She can make them smile, she knows, so when they're not smiling, she feels she has done something wrong. It makes her stomach hurt, the stress of keeping them happy.

CHAPTER THREE

I was baptized on March 18, 1990, at the evening service at First Baptist Church of Dade City, Florida. The sanctuary was darkened, and a spotlight lit on me in the baptismal pool. Pastor held his right hand over my head. He offered me his left arm for balance. He offered me redemption. He lowered me backward into the water, saying, “You are buried with Christ,” then lifted me up—“and raised to walk in the newness of life.” I stood dripping, beaming, in a white robe, in the spotlight. There was instant applause. I was seventeen years old. I had rebelled against my secular humanist upbringing and gotten saved. I had gone from being the only atheist at Pasco Comprehensive High School to joining the youth group and two choirs at the Baptist church. And five years later, the little atheist girl would be a seminarian.

When we moved to Florida, I had to stop playing violin because there were no teachers in our rural area, but somehow, Papí found a used upright piano and money for weekly lessons. I also took ballet, tap and jazz dance lessons at Miss Sally’s Dance Studio in the heart of downtown Dade City (most girls in town did), though Papí warned me that a lot of dancers were stupid and had no real appreciation of music. I don’t know where he got that idea, but I do know that his sister, my half-sister, and one of my cousins were ballet dancers for a while. “They pull their hair so tight, it squishes all the brains out,” he said. He’d rather have me play in the orchestra. I found dancing hard work, and really good for me. It built up my kinesthetic awareness: ballet gave me strength and grace; jazz made me feel the music in my body; tap made me concentrate on sounds that weren’t music, sounds I made with my feet.

After Papí died, Mommy found me a voice teacher from a local university. He taught me about voice types and different styles of vocal music. We worked on my range and breathing technique, and he gave me real art songs to sing instead of just show tunes and operatic arias that were too big for my young voice. I sang around town, soloing with the St. Leo Oratorio Chorus, in church, and at the county fair. I went to music summer camp. Still, Mom insisted it was ridiculous to think I would ever make it as a singer. I'd never go to Broadway and I should stop dreaming. It was silly of me. I needed a real job that would make real money. She was dismayed when I went to college and majored in English and voice—but in retrospect, that's all I realized I was good at, at the time. In such a small town, I was not exposed to many professions, and I simply hadn't heard of any that I thought would suit me. My aunt and uncle in Oregon were in dentistry. I had an uncle who was a cop, a cousin who was a firefighter. Mom was a physical therapist. No one in the family seemed remotely like me, and neither did anyone in town. On "career day" senior year, I shadowed a Dade City lawyer. He had a shabby little two-room office, a secretary, lots of reference books that looked terribly boring. He didn't tell me there were different kinds of law and different types of practices, that lawyers could move up to being judges or politicians. So I never gave the law another thought.

My mother is not effusive. She is not the kind of person to exclaim over much of anything, good or bad. I tell her I got a big scholarship, she says, "That's great, sweetie." I tell her my friend is dying, she says, "Oh, that's sad," and frowns. I actually like people who exclaim over things—who congratulate or thank you or commiserate with you seven times before the conversation moves on. It can be really lovely when someone's spirit comes up to the surface and overflows in the same direction with yours. Some people just spontaneously say, "I love you," "I'm proud of you," "You were so sweet to help me—thank you!" I'm one of those people. So is my husband. So are most of our friends, male and female. Those are my people. If I want my mother so say she loves me, I have to say it first.

If I want to hear that she's proud of me, I have to ask, "Mommy, are you proud of me?" She is, she just doesn't say it without prompting. In recent years, I've decided to make light of it, the gap between my need and what she offers. I say, "Mom, tell me I'm a good daughter. Say how you're so proud of me. Say you love me." And she will.

I guess it's just her personality to be more reticent, not to allow herself strong emotions, but it's also probably part of her culture. I have never had a lot of time with extended family, but even when I was young, the contrast between Mom's and Papi's families was striking. Visiting our Puerto Rican grandparents in New York City, the smell of *ropa vieja*, and black beans with onion and garlic, would be the first to meet us at the elevator on their floor. At the apartment door, we would be met with loud exclamations, full-body hugs, kisses on both cheeks from everyone—aunts, uncles, cousins—a dozen warm, loving people who were delighted to see us. They made much of me and brought me enormous beautiful fruits: an orange I couldn't fit my hands around, an apple the size of my head. Visiting Mom's mostly Czech family in Oregon, we would be met at the airport with a handshake and a quiet, "How was your flight?" When we left New York, there were protestations of love—we love you, we love you, come back soon, be safe, take care, love you, happy New Year, love you. I don't remember loving words from anyone on Mom's side, only once a loving touch on my hair from a great-auntie. It is probably unfair, but the message I got was that my father's family loved me and my mother's family didn't.

The first time I went to church was for a concert, invited by an innocuous freshman girl. It was an October evening, and First Baptist was hosting a series of performances—bands, choirs, even a magician—to attract visitors. I ended up enjoying the music and returning the next week for the next concert. It felt nice to be included. I hadn't realized how many of the First Baptist "youth" were already friends of mine, nor that they happened to be the other really Good Kids in the community.

I knew T and L and her brother and some of their friends were involved in the Presbyterian youth group; I also knew they were heavy drinkers, materialistic, and, if T was typical, both sexually forward and fairly brutal. Not my people. I continued to visit the Baptists, though only on Sunday evenings, and I grew slowly more comfortable with them and more curious about their culture and beliefs.

The hour before evening service was youth choir practice, and everybody sang. I couldn't resist the invitation, and started singing with them. The hour before that was something called Discipleship Training, which consisted of the dozen or so high school students sitting on sofas and chairs in a spacious room, eating pizza, drinking Hawaiian Punch and discussing the moral issues of the day. It was fascinating to me—these schoolmates of mine held the same moral views I did, held them strongly, but for completely different reasons. That is to say, they *had* reasons, and spent time thinking about them and talking about them, whereas I had only intuitions. Of course, their reasons had to do with pleasing a God I didn't think existed, but they also had to do with an obligation to take care of other people, and manage resources wisely. We had the same ideas about purity, and the sanctity of marriage, which was enough to give me some sense of affiliation.

I didn't know the word "introvert" at the time and wouldn't learn it for several years, but I did understand myself well enough to realize that the quietude and structure of church was part of what made it comfortable for me. There were no random elements; everything was meticulously planned. There was music: piano, organ, choir, orchestra. And all the conversations came back around to a book. I started reading the Bible just so I'd know what everyone was talking about. There were also cute boys—smart, cute, nice boys—without sexual pressure; in fact, the opposite of sexual pressure. It couldn't be better as a social setting for me. At the time, I thought I was being drawn to First Baptist because of individual people and specific activities. I thought I was being drawn by the Holy Spirit, moving in my heart. All these things are true. Looking back, though, I see my involvement in the church as a trauma response. I had been on the outside my whole life. I wanted to belong, not to be

isolated any more. I needed a safe place to explore my attractions to boys without being mauled or assaulted. I needed adults, both men and women, who would take an interest, look out for me—ask questions about my life and really listen to the answers, give me advice. I needed to see loving married couples who could be role models for me. Looking back, it was the grown-ups who kept me coming back to First Baptist. It was family I was craving. I needed it more than ever.

I found the Bible sort of fascinating; it was the oldest literature I'd yet encountered, and it became my after-school hobby to read it. I've always read several books a week, fiction and non, outside of classes. Now I spent an hour or two every day for a month, reading straight through the text from beginning to end. Granted, some parts were more interesting than others, and some parts were definitely clearer than others. It was a project—a methodical investigation of Christianity. I didn't think to consult any other sources, go to the library, ask my teachers about the church or its beliefs. The good people of First Baptist seemed to rely only on Scripture, so that was all I read. The parts that stood out to me were the poems—especially the Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, what I later learned are called the Wisdom literature. The gospels were a bit more familiar from my minimal church experience, and I read them over and over again, trying to uncover the mystery of Jesus.

I'd known a few religious people as a kid, and asked my parents about them—about what church was, what God was, and why it was so important to some people. They told me a lot of folks had a hard time being good, so they invented an invisible person to reward and punish them, but we didn't need that. At church, I learned that Christians pitied us nonbelievers for being evil, sad and alone. We pitied them for being so weak. The Baptists of Dade City didn't strike me as weak, or strange—maybe a little rigid, but rigidity appealed to me just then. I read and read, and when I'd finished reading, I went back to a couple of passages that I had found particularly opaque in the New Testament, and I prayed for the first time.

“So,” I prayed, “God.”

“If you’re real, and this is your book, I’m trying to understand this phrase right here—can you explain it to me?” The understanding came before my next breath. I flipped a few pages.

“Okay. Well... what about this verse?...Wow. Um, and this one?”

Clarity. Insight. Comprehension. I sensed suddenly that I was connected to the source of all knowledge, of all wisdom and truth. The conversation continued over several days, until I felt not only enlightened, and educated, but also convinced of the reality and the presence of God.

Over the following weeks, I began to expand the range and frequency of my prayers, asking God’s advice on school projects and ordinary decisions, always getting clear and ready answers. As I continued to attend Sunday evening and sometimes Sunday morning worship, my understanding of how to pray grew, as did my ideas of what to pray for. Most memorably, I asked God to change my heart—my character—in two respects. First, the adults of First Baptist, who always asked after my mother in the sweetest way, subtly encouraged me to be more loving toward her. They helped me, possibly without meaning to, to sympathize with her position as a widow with two kids and without family help. One day, I asked God something very Baptist, it seems, looking back now. I asked Him to give me a “servant’s heart” toward my mom. I was a traumatized seventeen-year-old suffering from major depression, pretty self-absorbed, not a whole lot to offer, but I was suddenly determined to be the very best daughter I could be. Mom needed and deserved my cheerful help in all things. And in that moment of my asking, I felt my attitude shift. I felt full of devotion to a mother who for most of my childhood had been emotionally distant, who I never felt understood or even tolerated my sensitivities. This was the beginning of a new relationship between us, the first step toward the close friendship we have today.

The second time I asked God to change me, I was in a shopping mall in Lakeland, Florida. It was new and shiny. It was the holiday season of 1989, a good year for fashion. Victoria’s Secret was still Victorian, full of white cotton nightgowns with high, ruffled necks displayed in dark wood cabinets

that smelled like roses, while invisible string quartets played in the background. It was a beautiful, peaceful place—and I wanted everything. But that wasn't the problem. I was used to being too poor to have the clothes and accessories and cars that other people had. The problem was, now I wanted to be like them, to look like them. As I walked around the mall, it was other women and girls—I wanted this one's hair and the other's figure, someone else's straight, white teeth. I realized that my outsider status over the years had made me envious, even of my friends. I envied their lovely houses, their boyfriends, their sports-cars, their popularity, their sweet-voiced stay-at-home mothers. Right then, I sensed the ugliness of that attitude and wanted to be rid of it. I didn't even think about working on myself. I went to God straight away, like a good Baptist would.

“Lord, please take this envious spirit away from me and help me to love people with a generous heart.” Immediately, I felt lighter, happier. I looked at the same mall-girls whose style I'd been coveting a moment before, and found I was able to be happy for them that they were so lovely. I thought of my friends and all their beauty and popularity and families and possessions to test myself. I felt around inside my heart and there was no sourness, no jealousy. They were wonderful, sweet people who deserved to enjoy their gifts. I had gifts of my own. And a God who loved me. Ever since, envy has given me barely a twinge.

Over the weeks and months as my faith grew, I began to consider joining the church. On the one hand, it didn't seem so important, since clearly I could connect with God on my own. On the other hand, every sermon at First Baptist focused on the need for salvation, and every service closed with an “invitation”—basically the pastor fervently entreating every unbeliever to “come to Christ,” and every non-member to join the congregation. What was still unclear to me was what it would mean to be a Christian, to be a Baptist. I suppose I was bound to give in eventually, though, to the pastor's pleading, the choir singing all six verses of “Just as I am” twice through, the prayers of all my new friends that I would “trust Jesus” and “know the Lord.” I was learning God's truths from the

Scriptures day by day, drawing closer to Him. I began to trust God to lead my decision-making, since I heard his voice so clearly in my mind. It became such that I felt God's presence continually and sensed I had a direct and immediate connection. There was still a lot in Pastor's sermons I did not understand, but it was obvious in every service I attended each week, that the people around me wanted me to be baptized and join the church. Those two actions were very important, and would make me one of them. Whatever it meant to confess Jesus as your savior, it led to being baptized by full immersion, and church membership, and no one could do it for me, Pastor said.

That was all I understood, and it became what I wanted—to be part of this big, gentle, clean-living family, to date one of their handsome, clean-cut sons. I wouldn't have to be afraid of sexual aggression from these boys; they were mature and self-controlled. And sweet and funny and bright and hard-working, all of them. One in particular, Kevin, had made it clear that when I became a Christian he would be waiting for me. I'd never been much of a joiner, but I do like people to be pleased with me.

I'd finally made up my mind. I would "walk the aisle" Sunday night. I'd always found it more comfortable than the more formal morning service. The youth choir would be singing, so instead of thirty grown-ups, I'd have ten of my peers looking down at me from the choir loft, including Kevin. Each step toward the pastor would bring me closer to all of them. At the end of the first verse of "I Surrender All," I left my seat and walked slowly down to Pastor Jolly. He held both my hands in both of his and turned his right ear to my whisper.

"I'm ready to join the church and be a Christian, Pastor," I said.

"Do you believe the blood of Jesus covers all your sins?" he asked. *What?* There wasn't supposed to be a quiz. No one had said anything about a quiz.

"I don't know anything about that—I just know God loves me and wants me to be part of His family."

“Does the blood of Jesus cover all your sins?” he repeated.

“I don’t know—I guess—I don’t know about blood and stuff.” *How revolting and morbid and strange.* “I just know God loves me..” *Like you’ve been saying for months now?* “And He wants me to be part of His family.” This did not satisfy him. Something was wrong with my answer. I’d messed it up somehow. Suddenly, Pastor motioned to the side and two beefy men came up to us. He whispered to them and they swiftly escorted me out of the sanctuary like Secret Service agents or bouncers. *Exeunt* stage left, with great embarrassment.

These men were deacons, they explained as they walked me to the pastor’s office. Without us, the evening service would draw to a close. Anticlimax. They showed me to a low leather sofa that puffed up around me when I sat. They stayed standing, resting their hips back on the edge of the pastor’s enormous desk. I still had no idea why we were there, why I hadn’t been able to write something on a little card and just join the church. I thought maybe the pastor would join us, but he didn’t. Instead, the deacons, like football coaches in shirtsleeves, started the quiz all over again.

“Olga, do you believe the blood of Jesus covers all your sins?” I didn’t like even hearing about blood.

“If you died tonight, do you think you would go to heaven, or hell?” I didn’t really believe in heaven or hell but now seemed the wrong time to say that out loud.

“If you died tonight,” (whoa, all this morbid death and blood talk!) “and you stood before God at the Pearly Gates,” (like that was a literal place) “and God said, ‘Why should I let you into my Heaven?’ What would you say?”

That seemed the strangest question. In all the sermons I’d heard and the Bible reading I’d done (and I’d read the entire New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs by this time), it didn’t seem to me that God was trying to keep people out, or away. Jesus in the gospels was always inclusive and welcoming: “Let the little children come to me,” and all that.

I instinctively understood in that moment that these men—the deacons, the pastor—and likely many other people, were drawn to Christian faith and the Christian church out of a fear of dying, and a hierarchical, restrictive notion of final judgment. They sensed or believed that only some people would ultimately be on God’s good side and the rest would be actively punished—tortured, really—for all eternity. Forever, for an unending for-ever. I had no such notion. My attraction to faith and the church was based on themes of love and goodness, acceptance and family. We were coming to the question of church membership from fundamentally different positions. From the patriarchal, First Baptist standpoint, I needed to pass their test because the kingdom of heaven was only available to a select few. And I kept failing the test, I realize now, because I didn’t speak the language of atonement—blood and death and sin and such. I didn’t understand their concept of redemption.

It was decided that I needed to take a special six-week Sunday School course for “new believers” before I could qualify for baptism. They handed me a workbook filled with simplistic, line-drawn cartoons and six Bible verses on perforated, punch-out cards for me to memorize. “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” “For God so loved the world.” “If you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth.”

One drawing had a genderless stick figure captioned, “YOU,” on the left and an empty space labeled, “GOD.” In between was a big, deep, cavern with only the word “SIN” inside. The same drawing appeared on the next page, but with a cross bridging the divide and the name “JESUS” on the cross. I went along, feeling a bit unsure about the process; it wasn’t quite hoop-jumping, but I didn’t think my relationship with God was going to change because of six Sunday School classes. When I’d finished the workbook and could recite all six verses from memory, my teacher told me I was cleared for baptism. I would be baptized at the beginning of the next evening service and welcomed as a new member at the end, after I’d dried my hair and dressed again. I wore a one-piece bathing suit under a white robe and walked barefoot into the warm baptismal pool. The Pastor

removed his jacket and put on chest-high waders under his white robe. He looked like a fly fisherman. Kevin lingered significantly, after the service. Now we were free to date; after years of flirting off and on, we were free to fall in love, which we promptly did, as hard and fast as only seventeen-year-olds can do.

I had come to faith in my own time, on my own terms, so I was never tempted to conflate or confuse my relationship with Jesus and my relationship with Kevin, but as a new Christian, I apparently needed a lot of guidance, a makeover in some respects. Kevin and his mother, along with my Sunday School teacher and the pastor's wife, were there to make sure I got it. My hems needed to be lower, my necklines higher, I needed to wear stockings and a slip and if at all possible, a strand of pearls. Makeup should be minimal, voices quiet. I went on a hayride (really—a hayride) with the youth group before I joined, and I was whistling a song, and the Pastor's wife looked at me sharply and said, "You know what they say."

I didn't know what they say.

"Whistling women and crowing hens always come to some bad end."

All I understood from this handy axiom was that she wanted me to stop whistling, but I didn't understand why she felt that whistling was something only men should do.

Apparently, there were a lot of things only men should do, like offer communion and pass collection trays and lead prayers out loud. Even in their homes, before a meal, or a *snack*, the women of First Baptist Church would look to a man to "give thanks"—a husband, a son, a male visitor. I thought it was strange, especially since these women—Sunday school teachers, choir members, deacons' and ministers' wives—were considered model Christians. Surely God would be happy to hear from them? I felt some offense, both on their part and on my own. What did women lack in

order to offer prayer? I was good with words, I wasn't shy of speaking in public. But I was never asked to pray, not even to thank God for the pizza and root beer.

I remained properly quiet and compliant, however; I worked at being humble. I chose to assume that either others knew better than I or that there were perhaps obscure traditions that must be kept, that held some sort of obscure value I couldn't identify. Lots of traditions. My family had never prayed before meals, but with the Baptists, even in public, in restaurants, there was hand-holding and head-bowing, and women only prayed out loud when there were no men in the party. And if you ate even one French fry before that prayer, someone would look at you and say, "You know that hasn't been blessed."

So, there were lots of rules—rules were better than chaos. Rules make things feel safe. They make containers so that everything has a place where it goes, and you don't have to wonder what will happen next, because you already know. Everybody knows. It's been agreed upon, so there's no fighting or arguing and no worrying that it might all suddenly change. I buttoned up my shirts and went along. The word "controlling" had not yet entered the public lexicon. If you'd asked me at the time, I probably would have thought it was a good thing, something along the lines of "leadership." It also had not quite dawned on me that more controls were placed on the sisters of the church than on the brothers. I barely had time to register these observations as legitimate problems, though, before it was time to leave First Baptist. I joined in March and five months later, I was headed to college, to the University of Florida in Gainesville, just ninety miles up the road.

It's a decision I regret now, to be honest, with no disrespect to my alma mater and with deep gratitude to the scholars and staff who educated me. I regret not applying to more schools, like young people do now (I applied to only three). I regret not applying to all-girls' schools. I regret not considering student loans. Mostly I regret not going farther from home, not going to the best school that offered me a full ride, just because it was so far away, in Pennsylvania. Without the benefits of

the internet it was hard to imagine life in another region of the country. We couldn't afford to make a lot of school visits. Primarily, though, I felt I needed to be close to home—for my own peace of mind, I wanted to be able to get back to Mom and Cooper quickly if they needed me, or I them. A few high school friends were headed to UF, which also provided a bit of a comfort zone, but proximity was the main draw.

Hindsight is 20/20, yes? If I'd known then what I know now? If I had it to do over again? I would have read about the Gainesville murders in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, from the safety of my Carnegie-Mellon dorm room. Instead, I lived the terror of a campus stalked by a serial rapist and killer for my first week away from home.

I prayed a lot, for myself and the young women of Gainesville, for the police and sheriffs and the Florida National Guard, for the families of the victims, whose list grew to five over three days. I stayed awake, praying, in the hallway one night, talking about death and God with two other girls. It was easier to be in the well-lit hallway than our dark, tiny rooms. Finally, the university decided to shut down for a week to facilitate the search, and we all went home. I took a self-defense class and learned to use a small metal weapon called a kubaton. It was my keychain for the next four years. I held it ready in every parking lot and dark stairwell. The murders stopped, but the “Gainesville Ripper” was still at large. It took law enforcement until May to identify him, a sociopath named Danny Rollings. He had been living in a tent in a wooded area just off-campus. He wasn't charged until the following November, in 1991.

If the freshman class of 1990 had a motto, it was, “Never Walk Alone.” My days and nights at UF were marked by caution and an anxious camaraderie, the sort of bond that forms between bank hostages—we're all in this together, might as well try to joke a bit and eat the pizza. If you had an evening class, you walked home with a friend. If you didn't have any friends in the class, you made one—you asked loudly at the end of the first session, “Anybody live around the Tolbert Area?” or

Broward or Beatty or wherever your dorm was. Anyone who did would walk with you all term. If all else failed, you called a male friend to meet you. I walked home from dinner one night with my friend Bill, a big joker. In a particularly dark stretch, he shouted, “Heeeeeere, rapist-rapist-rapist-rapist!” As if he were calling home a cat. We specialized in black humor, the class of ’94.

In fact, there were rapists aplenty enrolled at the University of Florida. Stalkers and street harassers, too. We even had a few more murders before our four years were up. Off-campus, in student apartment complexes. No one’s actually been murdered on campus, as far as I know. But there was a clear pattern of young women being targeted in their homes. Gainesville, as everyone there knows, sits between two highways—I-95 to the West and US 301 to the East—and is surrounded by state and federal prisons. Just to the South is a vast prairie, 21,000 acres of marshes, full of alligators and bobcats, really great for dumping bodies. There was a culture of violence that created a vulnerability both real and perceived, which was higher, I think, than in most other university towns. Even today, Gainesville’s rate of violent crime is significantly higher (48%) than the Florida average, and the Florida average is higher (by 25%) than the nation overall. Long story short, I never felt safe there. And in many ways, I really was not safe there.

Gainesville, Florida is a pretty little town of (then) about 100,000, more than 50% being university folk. It has one mall and three high schools and its broad streets are lined with pine trees and shiny green royal palms. It’s lush. There is shiny greenness everywhere. All the campus buildings are red brick with white trim. I drove through recently, and had to admit, it was beautiful. I enjoyed living in the honors dorm, I had several good professors and a few interesting classes. I quickly found a church I liked with dozens of older students and adults to nurture and guide me. I got involved right away with the choir there, and a small ensemble that sang Christian pop music. We were called *Hosanna!* With the exclamation mark. And I have my first positive food memories from Gainesville—perhaps because I was on my own for the first time, able to make my own decisions about what I

would eat, as well as having more options than in Dade City. I ate barbeque chicken pizza when it first came out, gourmet vanilla-blueberry muffins at the Mill, wine and cheese dressing on tiny salads at Chaucer's, fried chicken and enormous gooey cinnamon rolls at Grandy's. I learned to make sweet tea and pasta primavera from scratch.

Half my life has passed since I lived in Gainesville. I'm sure there's a lot I don't remember, but most of my memories are negative. Academically, I was rarely challenged. I never made any close friends, and church was, overall, not a good influence on me. I distinctly recall sitting in a folding chair circle of college freshers in Sunday School where we were each saying the career we wanted to pursue. I sat there, in my floral dress, complete with slip and stockings and pearls, and said, "I just want to be a Christian wife and mother." I didn't want to be married. I didn't want to be a mother. I have never wanted to be a mother for more than twenty minutes about twice a year. It was what I thought was the right answer. I had left high school with the English prize, the History prize, two full scholarships, and already all ambition had been squeezed out of me.

An atmosphere of bullying and domination seemed to hang over my social scene, and it seemed to be based in the Baptist church, since I loyally chose to socialize only within Baptist circles. The Baptist Campus Ministries (BCM) was a simple brick building right at the North edge of campus. Around a hundred students met there every Thursday night for a cheap supper, a short sermon, and some entertainment—there was a little stage, I sang sometimes, people read poems, did skits—and at least a dozen were usually there eating sack lunches or takeaway at midday. It was a quiet place to study or nap, to organize ministry groups or Bible studies. There were other campus groups for Christians, and I gave them a try, but Campus Crusade for Christ was super social, full of frat boys and sorority girls. They were people who danced and drank alcohol. Intervarsity Christian Fellowship was pretty Greek, too, and judging by the gathering I went to, seemed dominated by young men. It felt muscular. I knew some people who were in FCA, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, but I

wasn't an athlete. And I had already established a loyalty to the Baptists. I was a Baptist. That was my team, and if there were Baptists involved in these other campus ministries instead of in their churches or the BCM, that seemed like a mistake to me. If someone wasn't at a BCM event because it conflicted with an InterVarsity or FCA event, well, it was clear their priorities lay with a *club* and not with the church.

This type of thinking had already become a pattern for me, a default setting. Once I decided to join the Baptist church, I was all in, and every other option was inferior. Once I decided on the University of Florida, I was a Gator. It never occurred to me to transfer, even when a serial killer was picking off students one by one. I loved nothing so much as a strong institution. In a few years, I would choose to install myself in one august institution that represented both the Church and the Academy—the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary—and no amount of turmoil or oppression could prevail on me to leave. Not for nine years. Not until I'd earned two terminal degrees and completely iced any chance of my having an academic career in the real world.

Kevin's devotion to me did not survive even a few weeks at separate colleges. I was lovely and tragic and naïve. I did not lack for male attention. Like Kevin, though, the Baptist guys at college also wanted to control my behavior—apparently, I was too friendly, too physically affectionate. At UF I finally met other Latino students. My fast conversational style, hand gestures, and propensity to sit on people's laps and touch their wrists or hair while we were talking fit in just fine with them. Apparently, that came across as flirty to white people. It upset me to be misunderstood and I found it frustrating to have to change my demeanor. It felt stifling, but I did it. My world was 98% white. I look 98% white. I needed to fit in. I tried to act more like my Oregon family. There were two or three guys who used our common faith to try to bully me into going out with them. One in particular, a tall, strongly-built blond man, made his case week after week, even following me to class one day, arguing loudly

that I owed it to him as his sister in Christ to go out on a date, or at least, to give him my phone number. He didn't try to sweet talk. He wasn't fazed by my lack of interest. He didn't try to get to know me. I managed to shut him down eventually by continuing to walk away. His behavior upset me a lot, but in a way, he was far easier to deal with than some other boys whom I actually liked.

The most bizarre relationship I ever witnessed, I was also a part of. I could call it a love triangle, I suppose, but none of us was really in love, or even dating one another. We were just—chastely—sleeping together. And one of us slept on the floor.

The triangle was between me and two other Baptist students: R and K. R was my best friend, I realize now. He lived downstairs in the honors dorms. He was super smart, an engineering student; tall, dark, and handsome, except for his crooked, crowded teeth, which only made him more interesting. We connected at the BCM the week before classes started. R and I “shopped” for a church together, visiting three churches in three weeks, in R's green pickup truck. Then we both joined Westside Baptist the fourth week and we started driving to church together. We joined *Hosanna!* together; we went to Thursday night BCM dinners together; we met up for lunch a couple times a week. But R and I were just friends. Friends who really liked kissing each other. I'd only kissed three other boys up to that point, but I thought R was an awesome kisser. The first night I slept in his room was the second night of the murders.

He invited my roommate and me to stay over, sleep in the beds—he and his roommate would sleep on the floor. Their room was underground, with only a small window at ground level. We felt safer there, and managed to sleep. I did wake up several times in the night; I opened my eyes to see R on guard, standing at the door, holding a baseball bat. I loved him for that, but we weren't in love. I don't remember when we kissed for the first time, probably because we never had an actual date. We spend a lot of time together, but none of it felt like dating. We liked each other tremendously, R and I. We understood each other, and we were attracted to each other. In today's terms, we were friends

with benefits—but we were also good Baptists with well-suppressed sex drives, so the only benefit was kissing. Once every week or so, R would come up to my room to climb into my top bunk and smooch and snooze, or I would go down to his room and climb in his bed, kiss for an hour or two and then sleep on his shoulder until morning. We weren't "fuck buddies." We kept our pj's on. We were "cuddle buddies," at least for freshman and sophomore years. What made it weird was K.

K was a year ahead of us in school; like us, she was active at Westside and the Baptist student union. Everything she did, though, was behind the scenes. K cooked and served and cleaned up after the Thursday night suppers. I got the sense that before she came, the dinners were more collaborative, that students took it in turns to work in groups to cook or serve or wash up. K hoarded as much of the work as possible, martyring herself to Christian service. She also made herself, somehow, into R's personal slave. She did his laundry and ironing, cleaned his room and often slept on the floor by his bed, with only a blanket to stay warm in the cold, basement room. Not only did K want to be a martyr—she wanted to be abused. R came from a military family, so he knew how to be harsh and demanding. He liked sometimes to see how aggressive he could be, dare you to push his buttons, but by nature R was quite respectful and protective of women, nurturing, even. K pushed all the buttons she could, goading R into yelling at her, hitting her. K was distinctly unattractive, dumpy, with a face that looked like her spirit had somehow fallen in on itself. She and I rarely interacted, which was also odd, I suppose. Not that we had so much in common, just that we each had our quite different, quite private relationships with R.

I could only assume that R's father dominated his mother, and that K had grown-up in a terribly abusive household. As in other dysfunctional families, the worst behaviors were expressed in private, and I was there to witness: R knocking K to the ground; R pulling K by the hair; R biting K's arm hard enough to mark her; R threatening K with a hot iron. In every case, K instigated and escalated the violence. She always fought back until she pushed R to overpower her. And she always came back

for more. The iron incident happened one night when I was sleeping at R's. We were sitting on the bed studying, and K was ironing R's shirts. (His roommate was there, too; I can only imagine what he thought of the whole dynamic.) K decided to aggravate R and ramped it up until he was standing over her with the iron next to her face. K capitulated, as always, whined and fawned like a kicked puppy, and we all went to sleep. The roommate in his bed, R and me in R's bed, and K on the floor without so much as a pillow. That was the last time I slept over with R. Whatever the pathology was between the two of them, I'd seen enough.

Overall, I didn't date much. The BCM guys I crushed on were spoken for, and also tended to be slightly older and looking for wives. I gave myself a week sophomore year in which I went on dates with a different guy every night and two each on Saturday and Sunday. I didn't care for any of them. I just wanted to feel popular for a moment, something I'd never been. At university, at least outside of Baptist circles, it was okay for a young woman to be really smart. My major was nonthreatening—English—and I didn't wear black anymore. Actually, I dressed pretty well. I had to wear a dress for my weekly voice lessons, weekly convocation of voice students, and weekly voice studio performances, as well as any time I was singing in a diction class, and I took four. But I didn't generate a lot of interest at the BCM or the music department. Most of the guys I dated I met in the honors dorm or English classes. I was the girl who had more male friends than female friends. Even with my male friends, though, things could turn violent rather quickly.

It is a yearly tradition, decades old, at UF that our resident hall complex, the Tolbert Area, hosts a tournament called Mudfest. Basically, every October, RAs dig up a big piece of the quad between the buildings and turn it into a giant mud pit. Then each floor sends a team into battle for a week of volleyball, Frisbee, and tug-of-war, men's floors against men's floors, and women against women. The referees sit in lifeguard chairs borrowed from one of the campus pools. The reader will

not be surprised to learn that I did not participate in these events. I did not even go to cheer. There was so much mud and noise and chaos. Instead, I watched my team compete from a skybox—the common room on the third floor of Weaver Hall, a men’s floor. My own dorm, East, had no good views of the pit and our common room looked out on a parking lot. I was also not going to yell; my voice teachers would have hanged me by the thumbs. I hung colorful banners and pounded on the window panes in support of the women of East Two. I knew how important all of this was. For the best view, I had to stand on a chair or a table. One day, I was up there, standing in the window, watching and cheering with about four or five boys from that floor. They were using the dining tables to make their own banners for Weaver Three. They had rolls of paper, paint, markers, duct tape.

I don’t recall what precipitated it, but suddenly the boys were all around me, duct taping my bare legs together and reaching to do the same with my arms. I screamed and cried, but all the RAs and most of the residents were far below, yelling and screaming themselves, splattered with mud. There were no adults around, no other women. There was no one to rescue me. I had been transformed somehow from a colleague and acquaintance into a plaything. After a few minutes of crying and pleading, the boys lost interest. Maybe they’d each had a fantasy of an utterly helpless woman but then couldn’t think what to do with her. They didn’t hurt me. They came to their senses after a moment of some primitive, *Lord of the Flies* blood lust, and cut me free. I ran back downstairs to my room and painfully pulled the duct tape off my body. No one saw me. Everyone from our floor was still downstairs. I didn’t ever talk about it. There didn’t seem to be anything to tell. It wasn’t a rape or an abduction. It only felt very close to one.

D lived on Weaver Three, but we met through the campus literary magazine sophomore year, and started dating, a few weeks after Mudfest. He was smart, headed for law school. He was funny, and bold. Our dates tended to be somewhat criminal enterprises. Essentially, D liked to break into

parks late at night and wander around in the dark. For our first date, he took me to the university golf course. We kicked off our shoes at the first tee and ran through the mist of the sprinklers. For our second date, he snuck us into the football stadium, right across the street from our dorms. We climbed to the top of the north side, where the university was about to start construction adding an upper deck to the north end zone. It would “bowl in” the stadium and raise capacity to 80,000 seats. We ran down to the field and imagined 80,000 fans, cheering. Then we saw several football players in dark hoodies silently running up and down the stadium steps on the east side. We quietly snuck back out. Several times, D took me to Loblolly Park, a local nature park that was easily accessed through a neighborhood. Once, he brought me to the University Gardens, near Lake Alice, where at least a dozen alligators live, and told me it was where Danny Rollings had been hiding all last semester. Rollings had just been charged with the “Gainesville murders,” and it looked like he was guilty.

The only time I got scared was the night we broke into Devil’s Millhopper, a nearby state geological park, built around an enormous sinkhole. D knew just where to park so the car would be hidden from the road, how to duck under the laser sensors at the gate. The trail was hard to follow in the dark; the park was more thickly wooded than we were used to, and the night was foggy. We decided not to use a flashlight. The air was dank and sulfurous as we walked down, down, right to the edge of the sinkhole. It was pretty creepy. We could hear but not see the many small waterfalls along the sides of the Millhopper. Suddenly, we heard a noise behind us. We froze and listened. There was another. We ran back to the car as quickly as the fog would let us, but the noises followed. It was a heavy, uncareful sound, like a large man was staggering through the underbrush just off the trail.

D liked to turn the headlights off when we were driving home from these adventures, which was always around one in the morning when few people were on the road. It was scary, but exciting, and gave us something to bicker and banter about. I didn’t really question why our activities were always nocturnal and secretive—and, technically, illegal. It was fun to break the rules for once, in a

way that wouldn't hurt anyone. D never spent money on me, but at least he was original. I'd certainly never heard of anyone else doing these things. The good thing was, D didn't pressure me for sex: I could trust him on that. He respected my Christian beliefs, although he didn't go to church himself. So it was extra awkward when I found a box of condoms in his room. It took me days to find the courage and the words to confront him. D's only response was a defensive, "Well, you never know what's going to happen." That made no sense to me. Sex was a rational decision made by two people, not a random happenstance. I took his excuse to mean he was expecting that one day I would suddenly abandon my principles and want to shag him. My second thought was that D was shagging other girls, since he wasn't getting anything from me. Eventually, he admitted he was sleeping with his ex. I was just grateful he wasn't expecting me to give up my virginity.

I did not break up with D over this revelation, but the trust was broken. It became clear to both of us over the next weeks that we didn't have a future together. D broke up with me, actually, lying on a blanket on the same quad where Mudfest had taken place, now re-sodded with grass. I was reading in the afternoon sun. He saw me and came over. D had an annoying habit of fidgeting with his Zippo automatic lighter, flipping it open and closed, displaying and then covering the flame. That day he brought out a pocket knife with a serious-looking blade. As he solemnly explained that things were over between us, D punctuated his sentences with emphatic stabs of his knife into the earth. I said as little as possible. When he left, I counted to a hundred and quietly went indoors.

That was the spring of 1992. I worked hard all summer on the orientation staff, registering all four thousand new freshers for fall classes and going to counseling for a depression I couldn't explain. I didn't hear from D. When fall semester started, I relocated from East Hall to Broward, nearer my classes in English and voice. I had a sweet new roommate, Stephanie, from the voice program, who sat with me in choir. On the day Stephanie and I moved in to our new room, the very second we plugged our phone into the wall, it rang. We looked at each other. No one had our number. We didn't

know it ourselves. I picked up, and it was D. He sounded angry. He wanted to see me. I refused and hung up. D continued to call, at random times, even at two or three in the morning. It was not clear at all to me why, but he began to threaten me. Because he was an RA now (though in a different area), he could get into our dorm, he said. His RA friends would watch us. If I didn't agree to meet him, he said, there was no telling what he'd be forced to do.

Stephanie and I grew more frightened by the day. We told our RA—she said there was nothing she could do. We called campus police—they said they couldn't intervene in “domestic disputes.” He'd broken up with me months ago, I tried to explain, but I got nowhere. Finally, Steph and I put our brains together and came up with a plan. We would get hard evidence, a tape of D threatening me. We'd found that if you picked up a call just after the answering machine had started, it would record your conversation—both sides. It worked. I managed to tape D's next call and took it straight over to the University Police Department. Once they heard his language and his furious voice, they started taking me seriously. A cop who resembled a young William Shatner took my statement and promised to confront D personally. Florida had brand new laws against stalking, he said, and all the cops were itching to enforce them. I was advised to keep recording any calls, but after that day, I didn't need to. The calls and threats ended. Captain Kirk had saved the day. I felt I had an ally, a protector. I also felt I needed him. D might not call again, but he could snap at any time, and I had not forgotten that lighter, or that knife.

I didn't date anyone for a year and a half. The whole enterprise seemed rather fraught. I continued to suffer from grief and a vague unease; I continued to take advantage of the free counseling on offer at the student health center. I focused on school, which still wasn't challenging, so on top of literature and music, I added Italian, French, and German classes. I'd already learned the proper diction

and dozens of songs. I wanted to understand properly what I was singing. Living across a parking lot from the music building meant I practiced more, even late at night, which I would not have done with a longer commute. When I was bored, I spent time in the music library, listening to operas that hadn't been in my father's collection and to singers he'd sung with and introduced me to, like Fredericka von Stade and Barbara Hendricks. Not dating cut down on my stress and on the amount of violence I experienced. The only incident I recall (other than the Rodney King beating, which was distant but somehow felt less distant than it was) happened in that little parking lot outside my door. I was going to my car one day and a maybe-older-than-college guy walked up holding a clipboard, asking me to sign a petition. He reached out to shake my hand so I took it, on reflex. Quick as a snake, he had me pushed up against the car. I don't think I screamed. I don't remember screaming. I couldn't move my arms. I kicked, though, and stomped on his feet, used my knees, head-butted him until he backed away just enough for me to run. I ran to the music building, to the choir room, and just sat for a while, catching my breath. It felt good to have fought for once. And I had won. That felt good, too. I'd actually hurt him, and he hadn't hurt me. But it did *not* feel good to have been caught off guard, to have been attacked again. It was so easy for a man to take control of my body. A simple handshake was all it took.

That's when I remembered—this had happened before. Almost the same attack, four years earlier. It's late afternoon at the community college back home, and I'm leaving the library where I'd been researching a paper when two young men approached me. One holds a clipboard. They ask if I'll take part in a poll. Of course I'll help. They block the path to my car. I reach to take the clipboard. Suddenly, I am up against the side of the car being groped and pinched, all the while the men are asking me sexual questions so vile I don't even understand them. I beg them to get off me, leave me alone. No one is around. No classrooms or offices face out onto the parking lots. Classes are in session. I am on my own. My mind registers this fact, but not the further implications for what could

happen next. I keep struggling and shouting, using my feet, twisting my body and suddenly, I manage to wedge open my car door. As I'm climbing in, the two men drench me in spit. They curse me and spit all over me and call me vile names. But I get inside and lock the door. I lean on the horn until they move their car, which blocks mine in and then I drive away shaking and crying, the whole car reeking of saliva.

It is only now, looking back, that I see the pattern, that I recognize the fact that I have been physically traumatized at least a dozen times since first grade, and that each of these incidents was sexual in nature to some degree; at least, it was relevant that I was female, and that in each case, the perpetrators were boys my own age, touching me in unwanted, inappropriate ways, making me feel unsafe, and, later, dirty or ashamed. I also realize that this pattern of abuse by peers has made me quite trusting of older men.

For senior year, I decided to move off-campus. I wanted to pay a few bills, start to build some credit. I wanted to be more independent, stop sharing a bathroom with two dozen other people. The best set-up, I thought, was when a small group of friends rented a house together, but my friends were already situated, my former roommates paired off with boys. I found a studio apartment just half a mile from the campus park-and-ride lot. I also decided to get a part-time job. Up to that point, my father's Social Security money had covered my expenses, but I thought I should probably build a bit of a job history as well. The university had just completed a Center for Performing Arts, which was hiring stage-hands—twenty hours a week, afternoons and evenings, no experience needed. It was a beautiful facility, and I found that working behind the scenes was almost as exciting as being on stage myself.

I worked quick change costumes for Alvin Ailey and for the lead tenor in *Madama Butterfly*; I ran house lights for Ben Vereen and Natalie Cole; I actually turned pages for Jesse Norman's accompanist. I got to pick them up from the airport in a limo, rehearse with them, be on stage with

them. The most intriguing was loading in and building sets for David Copperfield. All the stagehands had to sign contracts promising we'd never discuss any aspect of how the show and its tricks operated. Then we were given booklets of instructions on how to construct each element of the set. I promise you, David Copperfield, Incorporated, I worked that show from load to close and I have no idea how any of it worked—not a single piece—and neither did anyone else.

I found immediately, though, that the Performing Arts Center was a man's world. There was only one other female stagehand, among the dozens who worked sound, lights, curtain, house lights, costumes, props, set building, loading, unloading, and running shows. All the management was male, as were most of the road crews. Sometimes it was an immature man's world. A roadie with Tom Jones asked me to take a shower with him. I hope he found someone. I just laughed—it was the boldest, most outrageous request. But he seemed harmless. Not everybody was.

Like myself, the vast majority of stagehands were students. Our work schedules and our duties varied week to week, but one young man, M, began to seek me out at the center, asking me on dates. I was not interested in him, so I said no, day after day, week after week. He was persistent. Eventually, I gave in. He took me out for my first plate of sushi. This was 1993; sushi was new and exotic. The sushi made me ill. I was sick to my stomach for days, with a violence and sharpness of pain I'd never experienced before. I thought I'd gotten simple food poisoning, but it dragged on for months. A blood test showed I had contracted *E.coli*. It was not a good omen for my relationship with M. And it did become a relationship, based solely on his interest in me and my lack of excuses not to go out with him. He could be funny and charming, but he was also pushy and domineering, though he tried to be pushy and domineering in a funny, charming way. M wouldn't take no for an answer, and I was too naïve to recognize that as a problem.

M began a new charm offensive, pestering me for sex, asking a dozen different ways. He began a game of seeing how long he could stay at my apartment before I'd get really upset. He would never

leave when I asked; he'd delay and delay, as though I couldn't possibly be serious. It never occurred to me that he was at all dangerous. It never occurred to me to call the police when he refused to leave. It never occurred to me that one day he'd stop asking for sex and just take it. But one day, in my little studio apartment, that's just what he did. On the pretense of massaging my back, he had me lie face-down on my bed. He sat on my legs, pulled my shirt up to rub me. Face-down, I couldn't see when he pulled down his own shorts, and I couldn't fight back when he pulled mine down as well.

It didn't last long. It wasn't bruisingly violent. I dissociated, floating away out the window so I didn't feel pain. For a while, I did not even admit to myself what had happened. M left in a hurry. Then the doorbell rang, less than a minute later. I thought it was M, come back, maybe to apologize. I opened the door, but hid behind it, still shaky. It was S, one of the Weaver 3 boys who had tied me up with duct tape. I wasn't naked, but I felt it. I'd never told S where I lived; no friends from the dorms had visited me. He had come, he said, to tell me he was getting married. I had taught him something, he said, about being a better man. He was sure I'd make someone a wonderful wife someday. I couldn't find any words or hold back my tears. I shut the door and ran to the bathroom. I threw up a little in the sink. I felt nauseated but I hadn't eaten much yet that day. Then I felt I had to poo, but what came out of me wasn't poo. It was a slimy clear liquid that smelled completely foreign. I felt even more removed from my body.

I began to understand what had happened, that the substance was semen, that M had entered me in a way I had never imagined and ejaculated inside me. It was a hideous thought, a disgusting reality. I was also relieved—there was no danger of a child, and I was still a virgin, at least in my own eyes. That was the most important fact to me. I felt damaged, and less worthy of being chosen by someone in the future, as S had come by to reassure me I would be, but I also clung to the deeper reality that I had not shared my body with this man, any man. I had been violated; whatever was gone had been taken, not offered, not given. And I was vaginally intact, which was important to me, a value

I'd absorbed from years of reading fairy tales and Jane Austen novels. That was a comfort, anyhow. Then the emotional pendulum would swing back towards the darkness and I would think, "But he raped me like a little boy. Not even like a woman. A little boy."

The next days were busy ones for me. I went to the library downtown to research sex and sexual assault, to determine if I had a case and what my next steps would be. I called the campus counseling center.

"I think my boyfriend raped me yesterday."

"Can you tell me what happened?"

I told them.

"... Yes, I think he did."

I was referred to a special branch of the counseling program, Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS), located on its own floor of the Student Health Center. I phoned them next.

"I think my boyfriend raped me yesterday. Campus Counseling told me to call?"

"Can you tell me briefly what happened?"

I told them.

"... Yes, I think he did. When can you come in?"

At SARS, I met with Catherine, who would give me weekly therapy sessions, and with Sandy, who ran rape recovery group therapy. She invited me to join a new group that was starting up, undergraduate women survivors who would meet weekly, in confidence. My next step, though, was a physical exam. Catherine walked me downstairs to a small room in the clinic, where a nurse probed around and swabbed my anus and vagina. A female doctor came in for a full pelvic exam. I had to explain again and again what had happened. They wanted to do a blood test, to check for sexually transmitted diseases. I desperately wanted reassurance on that front as well—AIDS was rampant in

those days—but I’d been penetrated enough. M was the only person who’d had “relations” with me, I protested. *He* should have to do the blood test.

Catherine backed me up, but explained that the next, the last step, would be to make a full report to the University Police. She called and made me an appointment with a woman named Maggie, a victims’ advocate with UPD, whose job was to shepherd survivors of violent crime through the process of pressing charges. I spoke with Maggie, told my story again. Though I hadn’t thought it possible, she was even more supportive than the counselling staff had been, as was the male detective who took my statement. Lots of rape and sexual abuse survivors seek counselling, they told me, but so few seek help from law enforcement. I was their hero, just by walking in the door. In the next weeks, they would become my heroes, because, as it turned out, that appointment was not the last step after all. The assault had happened off-campus, at my apartment, so UPD did not have jurisdiction. My statement was helpful in terms of M’s student record and greater accuracy of the university crime rate, but to press charges, my case would have to go through the Alachua County Sheriff’s Department. Maggie would drive me downtown and make sure I was treated properly, taken seriously and protected. For example, she would make sure my name and address were not released to the press. She would argue on my behalf for whatever outcomes I wanted.

At SARS, at UPD, at the Sheriff’s Department, I was asked the same two questions: “Did you say no?” and “What do you want to happen next, to M?” My answers were always the same. I had not said, “No,” because I had dissociated with shock—I didn’t really understand at the time what was happening to me—but I never would have said, “Yes.” As for what I wanted for M, I wanted first for him to take a blood test and a full STD screening. Second, I thought he needed counselling, and third, several hundred hours of community service, *not* around women or children. Last, I wanted a restraining order that would keep M from coming near me. I got all of that. Each of my requests was honored, but not without a few wrinkles:

1. M called me and apologized.
2. UPD detectives found another girl he'd raped the year before, the same way as me. She was a theatre student who'd worked with him at the Theatre school's performance space. She talked to them anonymously, but would not come forward with an official statement.
3. His blood test came back clear; ironically, I still had *E. Coli*. I wished he'd gotten it.
4. M went to counselling—his therapist called me and asked me to come in, too, that M wanted to have a couple's session, to help us work it through. I called my counsellor, Catherine, completely horrified. She helped back me up in my refusal. Maggie assured me I never had to be in the same room with M again.
5. Maggie and the UPD helped negotiate my keeping my job while M kept his; the stage manager at CPA said he'd never schedule us to be in the same place at the same time. Still, I always felt on edge at the performing arts center. M had a lot of friends there, among the packs of young male stagehands.
6. One of those friends, a long-haired sophomore called J, cornered me one February afternoon. He had been at M's apartment the night before. M was depressed, he said, and it was clearly my fault for breaking up with him. M was crying, and drinking too much, and not sleeping. He wasn't fun anymore, he wouldn't come out with J and the guys. J was angry. It also sounded like M was using him to try to get me to forgive him, come back, go to couple's counseling.

Over the next few days, J confronted me several more times. I thought he'd back off if he knew what the breakup was about, why I wouldn't even work the same shifts as M anymore. But when I tried to explain that M had violated me sexually, J exploded. There was no way his friend was a rapist. I'd been going out with M so long, I owed him sex. I was falsely accusing M, branding him for life

with this horrid label. That's why he was so depressed—I was ruining his life. I walked away. And J started stalking me. Wherever I was working around the performing arts center, he would find me, calmly and quietly remind me that he knew what a terrible person I was, that I deserved to be punished. I let Maggie know I felt threatened in relation to the rape case; I was being intimidated to drop the charges. She said she'd let the detectives know and to keep them informed if the situation escalated. Which it did.

The next day was February 14, 1994. I'd never managed to have a sweetheart on Valentine's Day. I had a restraining order against my last boyfriend—the last two, really. Not a super happy day. But after classes, when I got to my car in the Park and Ride lot, there was something red on my windshield—a bouquet of roses, wrapped in paper and plastic, along with a card. For a brief moment, I felt happy, the sort of cheered surprise unexpected gifts tend to evoke. Then I remembered there was no one in my life for whom it would be appropriate to give me a Valentine's bouquet. Also, even if it were from a friend or a boy with a crush I was unaware of, it is not the generally approved custom for Valentine's flowers to be delivered via windshield. Then I read the card. It was a sarcastic note from J, letting me know that he knew my car and where I lived as well, and he *hoped* I'd have a *beautiful* Valentine's Day after I was completely finished breaking his friend's heart. I got in the car and drove straight to the University Police station, walked into Maggie's office, shaking.

“Oh, are those for me?” she asked, smiling. Then she saw my face.

“They were on my car. I think they're evidence.”

I showed her the note and she called in the detective. We filled out another report. Then my first Valentine's flowers were dusted for fingerprints.

That week, the stalking continued and even intensified. At random times and places on campus, I would look up to see J watching me. One morning taking the Park and Ride bus to classes, I looked around as a fellow commuter lowered his newspaper to glare at me over the top, slowly

revealing his threatening face. It was J. I pushed my way to the front of the bus and burst out the doors as soon as they opened. I used a hall phone at the Music Building to call UPD. It turned out they already knew what had happened—undercover officers had been watching over me as well as keeping an eye on J since Valentine’s Day, news I found deeply comforting. Not only was UPD gathering evidence, building a case on my behalf, but they were near to hand, an invisible protective presence. There were guardian angels after all. If M or J, or even D tried to hurt me, I had a staff of heroes waiting in the wings. Now, UPD had all they needed to prosecute J, and the case could proceed with no more involvement from me. Without my mentioning the stalking to the stage manager at CPA, J also disappeared from the schedule whenever I had a shift. I didn’t have any further actions to take in the sexual assault case, either, but it would take some months to be fully resolved, during which I was required to remain in state.

My friends who were graduating with me were all either getting married or going to law school, it seemed. Some of the guys had jobs waiting in accounting or engineering, but the most popular option for the girls was marriage. None of that held any appeal for me, but I had no other ideas, no vision for my future. I felt so lost without Papí. I was still deep in mourning for him, and now I was recovering from being raped, which was harder than I had expected. Only years later would I begin to see the relationship between these two main traumas that shaped my adolescence. Only with greater distance and maturity would I recognize how my father’s death had left me stuck in childhood, looking for comfort and leadership, vulnerable to controlling men. I continued to seek guidance in the church as well, but I found myself reluctant to tell my religious leaders what I was going through, precisely because they were men. I couldn’t tell my pastor, or the director of the Baptist student center. I ended up confessing to the associate pastor at my church, a man called Eddie, who led services just for college students. I have no idea what he thought. I gave him no details. He may have considered me impure. Eddie only said a quick prayer for me to find peace in Christ and then moved on. I got the

greatest support from two groups of women, with whom I spent every Monday evening of that last spring term, in 1994. One was the rape recovery group that met in late afternoon. The other was a young women's Bible study and prayer group that met in the leader's apartment in the early evening. After a few weeks had gone by, both groups, about a dozen women in all, knew everything I'd been dealing with, the details of the assault, my changing emotions, my incoherent sense of inhabiting my body.

I did not admit the incoherent experience of inhabiting my mind. I was dissociating fairly frequently, even in public now, once even in an Albertson's supermarket. As ever, I moved to find a reflective surface to see my face, to see whether it would show Panic or Scorn, which themselves seemed to have shifted into Fury and Fear. I found mirrored tiles on the wall in the cosmetics area. As ever, my face was an utter blank. I located the items on my shopping list, and made it through checkout. When I spoke to the clerk, my voice sounded low and far away. I'd never had to interact with other people from inside this state. I sat in my car for a few minutes, waiting for it to stop, for the episode to end. I was afraid to drive. If my awareness could split while I was shopping, there was no guarantee I wouldn't black out completely while driving. It didn't stop. My studio was around the corner. I walked home carrying my groceries.

I had a pact with one of the Bible study girls, a nursing student named Brianna, that we would talk on the phone every other day, even just for a few minutes. If I didn't call her, she would call me. The sexual assault had left me in a whorl of negative feelings—anger, grief, regret, and a deep shame—that isolated me. Although I knew I was not alone, sometimes it was hard to reach out for connection. I spent hours each day lying on my twin-size futon, which was now a crime scene, mutely wishing for friends to reach out to me. I didn't want to inflict my darkness on anyone else. In this respect, the weekly therapy group was the best thing for me. There were four other girls, and two therapists: Sandy,

who was finishing her doctorate in Psychology, and her assistant, a young grad student. We were all enamored of Sandy, who was whippet-thin with long auburn hair, and who wore miniskirts, of all things. A rape counselor in a miniskirt. The irony was somehow cheering.

Two of us were seniors, myself and Nicole, both anxious to graduate and move on, move away from this campus, this town. Nicole and another girl had been in long-term abusive relationships and finally managed to drag themselves free. I couldn't comprehend what they'd been through, but they shared the shame and self-doubt that comes from being violated by someone close to you, but someone you've chosen. The other two girls were freshers. They'd come to UF even after the grisly rapes and murders and had suffered themselves. Ginny had been assaulted in her dorm room by another student. Lindsay had been gang-raped in a parking lot by an entire pledge class of fraternity boys. When she talked in group, Lindsay punctuated each phrase with laughter. She couldn't stop giggling, chuckling, couldn't allow herself to feel her actual feelings. We kept in touch after the end of term, after my graduation. Nicole and I still exchange Christmas cards. I visited Lindsay at her family's home in Indiana two years later. She had transferred to a college in New England, written to her sorority sisters, but asked them not to post her new address on the house bulletin board. They didn't listen. Members of the perpetrators' frat saw the address and contacted their brothers at her new school. Those fine young men stalked and threatened and terrorized Lindsay until she left that college, too.

Aug. 21, 2014

Katie session 2:10-3:15pm

I am happy and upbeat as our session begins, glad to see Katie after her month-long summer vacation. We had both been concerned about how I would do with her being gone so long, but I proudly report that I've experienced very little interference from Parts while she's been away. I've been building connection to my Resources, and working to build a greater sense of unity inside, amongst the Parts. When I find quiet moments, I send them the quiet. When I feel loved, I have been calling everyone's attention to it, inviting them to soak it in. The love is for all of them, too. About twenty minutes into the session, I feel a strong pressure on the right side of my throat. I sense it as being orange. As I tune in to the sensation, it moves, scooping up and around the whole larynx. There is a sharp pain on my right sternum, then in my right shoulder and jaw. We've found a Part who needs us.

Part 1 The Part does not identify with a name, but later, as I write about her, she wants to be called Barley. (I check in to make sure. Is it "Marley?" Nope. Barley.) Her eyes want to focus on the brass nailheads decorating Katie's armchair. We can both tell this part is very young, pre-school. We run into hypoarousal; she wants to fall asleep. My body collapses forward, forearms on thighs, head hanging down. Katie gives me the "tappers" to help soothe the hypo-aroused Part. It is hard to get any words from her. When she does speak, it is in first person singular, with a high-pitched babyish voice.

Katie asks her to look to her right, and see if anyone else is there with her. She looks up and to the right. There's a light there, but she doesn't tell Katie yet. She looks to the left because she doesn't know why Katie said she should look right. How does Katie know what is where? The left side is

empty. She looks to her right again, to make sure she's not making it up, and tells Katie what she sees. There's a white light, round and up high, like a face but fuzzy.

Katie says we can put a glass wall up between us and the white face, so we can still see it, but it can't get to us or hurt us. She asks if the face-person can see her. Katie says no.

Katie wants to know if we can tell who or what the face is, who's standing there?

Barley pauses for a breath. She says she doesn't want to say, but she thinks it's Mommy. She feels like a dark red heat is pouring up, from her waist up to her face; like she will throw up or pass out.

"Fall asleep," she says. Something's telling her to "fall asleep."

An older Part chimes in momentarily, chuckling. She says she can hear Mommy's voice saying, "Sleep is a good coping skill." She notes that sleep doesn't hurt anyone, or ask anything from anyone—it makes no demands. Then, she notices her posture is one that is a comforting fetal position, but also, simultaneously, takes up the least amount of space.

Katie asks if Barley knows about grown-up Olga-Maria, and the yoga-teaching, child-loving grown-up she is. She shakes her head; she did not know.

Does she want a friend? Or to go somewhere?

She wants to go outside, away from the Mommy face. She wants run into a big, green meadow.

As soon as she pictures the open parkland, Barley feels much better; the red heat dissipates and she doesn't feel sick.

Katie asks, "Does she want to be with Fred and Layla?" (My husband and dog.)

No, Barley just wants to be with the Protector and the Nurturer. Maybe Layla too.

Katie says the Mommy face is actually just another Part of me, doing a job, and we're going to talk to *her* now. Barley is content to stay in the field, in her safe place.

Part 2 is holding a mask of Mommy's face that's glued onto a stick, and lifting it high so that it looks as tall as Mommy. She has been holding the mask because she was trying to help us, the Tribe, not get in trouble. Her job is to memorize all the things grown-ups tell us to do, even the things they mention casually, and then remind us of those rules and expectations, so that we can be really good. She does the Mommy voice and says all the Mommy words, both when Mommy is there and when she's gone. This Part speaks in first person singular, but refers to the Tribe as plural.

Katie says she doesn't have to hold this mask anymore, and asks the Part if there is something else she'd rather do or if there is any obstacle to her letting it go. The Part briskly tosses the mask off to the left and runs outside to play. On her way out, she snaps over her shoulder that this was a dumb game. She's glad it's over. It is clear to me it was not her own idea. She says, if she wanted to play pretend, she would be a kid—a princess, a girl in a story—not a grown-up.

With these two Parts resolved, Katie and I go back to the somatic sensations; the throat pain and pressure resolve with another breath but sternum develops a sharp, pink pain on the upper right side. Katie says this is likely yet another Part.

Part 3 This Part manifests with a new eye gaze (the brown leaves on the carpet to the left of Katie's chair), a distinct head position, and facial expression. She is frowning, with very tight lips, as she struggles to find words for her feelings. I try to explain for her—it is something like anger and frustration at having to hold feelings and opinions back from Mommy. The facial expression is

“pouty”—she knows Mommy would say that she is pouting—but she insists that she is in fact *not* pouting. That assessment is wrong, and unfair. What she is is legitimately pissed (but she doesn’t know that word; I have to supply it, explaining her point of view to Katie, and the Part doesn’t hear me).

This Part is clearly older than the earlier ones, around twelve years old. She speaks in first person singular when she is speaking of and for herself, but she also uses first person plural—she is aware of and in contact with other Parts. As she begins to feel heard and accepted by Katie, she lifts her head and makes direct eye contact, talks directly to her. This one feels “sick of Mommy misjudging” her and putting her in a box, limiting her self-expression. The pressure in the sternum resolves into several colors, red and purple and dark pink. The colors are boxes of emotions, stacked high and deep on shelves, like in a shoe store. The storage space goes back and widens a little behind the sternum.

“What size do you need? We’ve got all kinds of stuff in the back,” she says, smiling. She is pleased with her clever solution.

“Why do the feelings have to go in boxes?” Katie asks.

Because, the Part explains, Mommy says:

“We’ve had enough crying.”

“Put a smile on your face, right now.”

“Don’t be melodramatic. You’re exaggerating.”

“You need to pull yourself together.”

“If you’re going to cry/pout/fuss/throw a fit, we’re going back home/you’re going to your room...”

“Go to your room and come back when you are ready to be part of this family again.”

Even when this Part has legitimate feelings that Mommy can name or respect, Mommy says: “You’re just going to have to put that feeling away somewhere... You have to find somewhere else to put that.”

Katie asks us to reflect on the stakes, the unspoken repercussions, consequences. What would happen if we didn’t find a way to put feelings out of Mommy’s way? The Part replies that Mommy would ignore her for a few hours, or maybe the rest of the day; she would make herself unavailable for any of your needs; she would send you away, outside or to your room.

“So, essentially, she would abandon you,” Katie says.

“No!” The Part rushes to Mommy’s defense. She argues that Mommy’s response had two purposes. One was that “Mom couldn’t handle the intensity and frequency of my stronger emotions, my artistic temperament. The other was that she thought I needed self-control as an important life skill. ‘You can’t go out in the world all raw like that,’ Mom must have thought. ‘You have to learn to control and manage your emotions. You have to school your face; bite your tongue.’”

“Where was Papi?” Katie asks. Oh, he was travelling, or working, or in some other part of the house, working on carpentry in the basement, listening to music. Absent, essentially. Certainly not on the field of battle. Not riding in to rescue me. If he did get drawn into the conflict between me and Mommy, he *always* took her side.

“You need to listen to your mother.”

“Don’t speak to your mother in that tone of voice, young lady.”

If I was angry, or crying too much, he would spank me (even up to age twelve) and isolate me: “I’ll give you something to cry about.”

Katie asks me to reflect again. “What does that mean, if he always takes Mommy’s side? Who’s on your side?”

No one. No one is on my side.

“Not even you, right? You’ve said before that even when you tell on your little brother, if he’s done something wrong, you still try to intervene to keep him from getting punished...You take your brother’s side, even when he’s upset you.”

It’s true. No one is on my side. Not even me.

CHAPTER FOUR

My road to the Southern Baptist Seminary was paved with good intentions. I didn’t “walk” at my baccalaureate graduation, even though I had earned honors and admittance to Phi Beta Kappa. I wanted to get home. I let the university mail me my diploma. For the next six months, I lived in Dade City with my mother and brother, who was himself headed to UF the following year, who would turn out an English major and a writer as well. I worked at Staples on the copy-and-print desk during the day, and sang for tips at Romano’s Macaroni Grill in the evening. To find these jobs I had to drive forty-five minutes south to the town of Brandon. The whole time, I was trying simultaneously to recover my emotional balance, my sense of self, and to decide the direction my life would take next. I was ostensibly an adult, but did not feel like one. My secret wish, every night at the restaurant and every day at the store, was that some man would come along and rescue me, take me away somewhere safe and provide for me. I had studied loads of women’s literature. I knew this was an antiquated, problematic notion. I knew I shouldn’t feel that way. I wished I were one of those confident young

women who had a resume filled with jobs and internships, who had travelled, maybe studied abroad. I wished I had a clear sense of calling or one overwhelming ambition. I only wanted to be taken care of. I would have married anyone who asked.

I knew I shouldn't feel that way. At age seven, I had wanted to be President of the United States. At age ten, I'd wanted to be a marine biologist. I was the academic superstar who'd barely studied in college. I was supposed to do great things. At age eighteen I was voted Most Likely to Succeed. Now at twenty-one, I felt more likely to have a nervous breakdown. I had lost twenty pounds since I started dating M, first from the *E.coli*, then from the stress of sexual assault, stalking, and pressing changes. Additionally, there was the stress of graduating, the transition, supposedly, to adulthood.

I looked for work all around the Tampa area. The only interview I got was with Progressive Insurance. No one thought that was a good fit. I began to think more about singing. I was making decent tips singing Italian arias and art songs table to table. People wanted to hear me. They would hand me cash; they would come back, and ask for me again. People would light up when I sang to them. Babies would clap their tiny baby hands. I decided I would make a trip back to Washington and audition wherever I could. The local opera companies were not hearing auditions, but I sang for the director of the National Cathedral choir, and he accepted me as a chorister. But, he said, I was still too young to find much work as a soloist. I could not make a living singing in a choir. I scheduled an audition at the Peabody Conservatory of Music on the Maryland side of D.C., where my own teacher had trained. I thought I'd pursue a Masters of Music in Opera, study with her teacher. I had never wanted to leave D.C. in the first place. Perhaps singing would help me find my way back. If I had been a simpler, happier girl, maybe someone would have wanted to marry me. If I'd been a more confident, more mature young woman, maybe I would have given myself more time to make a decision, to explore all my options.

Nothing about the city felt right, though. Nothing was falling into place for me. I wept some, prayed a lot. With two days left to my trip, I found myself driving a rental car around the city, listening, as I regularly did, to National Public Radio. I don't recall the program. I don't recall the speaker, only that she was a leader of the second wave of feminism, someone famous like Gloria Steinem, or Betty Friedan, and she was being interviewed by another woman, maybe Terry Gross or Diane Rehm. What I do recall are two of her statements, which have never left me. The speaker was offering advice to young women in my exact position, to my generation, on the cusp of adulthood, making choices about partners and parenting and careers. She said most young people make two crucial mistakes. First, they only envision their lives about five years down the road—we have a hard time, she said, thinking about what we want our lives to be twenty, forty, sixty years from now. *What do you want to show for yourself when you're 80?* I asked myself. Second, the speaker said, young people tend to think in terms of material success—what job will offer the highest salary or the greatest security—rather than focusing on the significance of their lives and work. Here was a radical new idea.

I knew immediately that both these statements were true of me, and that these problematic thinking patterns were keeping me from seeing my way clearly. I pulled the car over into a small city park and went for a walk. I felt God had spoken to me through that radio program, that God wanted me to think about my future in these new terms: long-term rather than short-term, significance rather than success. So God and I had a walk-and-talk and at the end I had a clear sense, a vision of my adult life, and what my contribution to society would be. I suddenly saw that many of the challenges I'd experienced in my life were unique to women—the stalking/harassment/sexual assault/abuse/eating disorder bits—and that most church leaders were men and that it was hard for them to serve the women in their congregations in these areas. Most of the time, I was sure, women and girls did not confide in their male pastors, or did not find true sympathy in their offices. Reflecting on the theme

of service, I felt God bringing to my mind at least a dozen times in the past four years that I had ministered to young women: prayed with and for them, listened to and encouraged them, shared my faith story with them, explored the Scriptures together. I began to imagine that I could build a significant life for myself by ministering to the particular needs of women and girls, and that I could do that in the context of a single, mid-size community. I would make a difference and that would make me happy, more fulfilled than would a life in opera. A few CDs and a handful of good reviews would not be enough to show for myself at age 80, I thought. Better to have no CDs and no reviews, but to be appreciated by a few hundred people. I just had to figure out how.

The next day, I drove to a Southern Baptist church I found in the Maryland phone book; the pastor had agreed to speak with me. I had seen in the ad that their staff included a Women's Minister, and I wanted to know how to become that. The pastor was warmly supportive. He asked how my interest developed, asked about my spiritual journey and listened thoughtfully. Then he said, "It sounds like you need to go to seminary." I hadn't heard of it. Seminary was grad school for ministers, he said, like law school or med school, but you studied the Bible and church history and theology and philosophy and psychology and everything you would need to help people find God and be well in their lives. It sounded awesome. I learned that each denomination trained ministers in its own way, that the Southern Baptist Convention had six seminaries and that the oldest and most prominent was in Louisville, Kentucky: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, his alma mater, referred to as SBTS or "Southern". The school had gone through some changes since he had graduated, the pastor said, but it was a great education in a great town and they had a lot of women students and faculty. There was no degree option specifically for women's ministry, but I could pursue Pastoral Counseling or a Master's in Christian Social Work. I remembered that Maggie, the victims' advocate at UPD, had

a Master of Social Work degree. This sounded like a terrific direction for me. I went home to Dade City to consult with the ministers at my own church.

While I'd been at university, the whole staff had turned over: we had a new, energetic young pastor, music minister and youth minister, and I was friends with all of them and their wives. It turned out they had each gone to a different SBC seminary—the pastor had gone to Southwestern Seminary in Dallas/Fort Worth; the youth minister had trained at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina; and the music minister was an alum of Southern Seminary. They each gave me the current catalog from their school. (They also gave me another brochure with cartoon figures in it. This one was something like, “IS GOD CALLING YOU TO SERVE?” It had Scripture verses to contemplate that would supposedly help you figure out if you were supposed to become a minister. Of course, the cartoon figure was male, as was everyone who helped him on his spiritual journey.)

Southern Seminary in fact had the greatest number of women on faculty. I didn't consider Southwestern or another Baptist seminary in New Orleans, because I didn't feel the bigger cities would suit me. More than anything, I wanted to feel safe. I'd heard there was a lot of gun violence in New Orleans and I didn't even want to contemplate navigating Dallas traffic. Just going by the catalogs, Southeastern looked small, its resources limited; Southern looked stately, with the classic elegance of a Southern belle. One of my friends from youth group, Carla, had just married and moved there with her new husband. They were both students. I booked a plane ticket and went to visit.

One evening in July, Carla and her husband picked me up from the airport with a picnic basket filled with Kentucky Fried Chicken, and drove straight to Central Park in downtown Louisville where the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival was performing Henry IV part I. Someone from their new church was in the show, and a contingent of Sunday School friends had come out to support him. I'd never known Southern Baptists to be so cultured. We spread out on a picnic blanket, on a gentle rise of lawn, next to families and couples with dogs. The play was terrific—it was one I'd read in college but

never seen. The park was lovely. There were tall oak trees and fireflies. The grass beneath us was soft, not spiky, the earth was real soil, not sand. And if the play was sometimes interrupted by a siren or a plane flying overhead, it only served as a reminder that I was in a city now. It reminded me, in every good way, of my childhood in Northern Virginia and D.C., of the cities' small parks, of the Folger, the Kennedy Center.

The next day, we went to the seminary, which was absolutely beautiful. Perfectly manicured lawns of Kentucky bluegrass. Georgian brick buildings with tall, white, Doric columns. I sat in on two classes in the School of Church Social Work and was impressed by the depth of discussion, which seemed to come from professors with a nurturing spirit cultivating the work of a small group of students. So this was grad school. In one session, a dozen or so MSW students went around the room talking about the challenges of their placements—some were working in group homes, others with schools, treatment programs and churches. Everyone I met was warm and open; they seemed genuinely glad I was there, and hopeful I would both apply and attend.

Carla and I walked the surrounding neighborhood that evening. Here were children's bicycles dropped on lawns, here were front doors open wide, even as twilight fell.

"People don't lock their doors here?" I asked.

"Not always," Carla said. "As you can see, sometimes they don't even close 'em."

We walked on, to Seneca Park, where a 1+ mile jog path loops around a central space of soccer fields, tennis courts and softball pitches. Even after dark, the fields and paths were filled with happy neighbors. It was the closest I'd been to Lake Woebegone or a Norman Rockwell painting. After years inside the terror of Gainesville, it seemed impossible, laughably implausible, that people lived like this, and in a real city. But as Carla pointed out, in this area, a neighborhood called St. Matthews, east of downtown, Louisville doesn't feel like a city. It doesn't feel suburban, either. It feels like a small town. That night, it seemed to be the best of all possible worlds.

The next day I had scheduled an audition with the Dean of the School of Church Music. I had been singing a lot of solos at my church in Dade City, even a full recital of Christmas songs, and the music minister, Brad and his wife, Janet, were alums of Southern Seminary. They were both terrific singers and instrumentalists, and had told me that Southern's music program was world-class in several ways: they regularly premiered major new church musicals; their lead hymnologist was a renowned composer of new hymns and arranger of old ones; their choir was outstanding; they trained a number of classical vocalists who went on to the annual Metropolitan Opera auditions; and the new Dean's wife was herself a lead soprano at the Met, and sometimes taught master-classes when she was in town. I had prepared songs in Italian and French, and an American aria, for my audition that afternoon, following the official campus tour, and leaving time to warm up my voice. I wore flats because we'd be walking the whole campus, but a pretty dress for the audition. Amongst the other prospective students visiting that day, I was a bit overdressed. I suppose I also stood out as a young, unmarried woman, on my own, while the others were men with their wives along, and several middle-aged career-changers who were finally "heeding the call" to ministry.

The tour guide was a young, attractive, clean-cut guy, well-dressed and well-spoken. His enthusiasm for the institution and for the campus was evident, and his tour-guide patter didn't read like patter. If I hadn't known from my own work with the UF PREVIEW staff how the Admissions office scripts these things, I would have believed that he just happened to know how many practice organs were in the Music building and the legend of long-ago students burying their textbooks in the quad after final exams. The only problem I had with the tour came at the end, when he pulled me aside and asked to take me to dinner that night. I was so surprised and flustered by the question, I agreed. Immediately I wondered why I had, and wished I could take it back. I suppose the whole tour had been geared towards getting each of us to say "yes" to Southern Seminary. I was primed to say

“yes” to him, the way a sales pitch might ask a series of questions you’re sure to answer positively before it asks you to buy their product.

I was uncomfortable, but also feeling fairly safe on Southern’s campus, and anyway, I had my audition to focus on. A female assistant showed me into the Dean’s office, where I waited with my sheet music, my résumé, and a bottle of water. It was a huge room, with two walls of windows and an enormous, black grand piano. I tried standing by it, then sat down on the edge of a tiny, striped sofa. Then the man himself came in and *I* felt tiny. He was tall and thickly built, barrel-chested, as my father had been; his voice was a musical, vibrating baritone. Even just speaking, it was obvious he was a highly trained classical singer. His hand shaking mine was a paw. I felt at home. Then, in the midst of introductory small talk, he asked to see the résumé. It showed the many state and regional voice competitions I’d won, the teachers and directors I’d worked with, including the Musical Director of New York City Opera, the operatic roles I’d sung and where, my training in foreign languages. But there at the top it said, “University of Florida, 1990-94, Voice Performance minor.”

“You were not a music major?”

“No, but I beat them in competitions,” I answered. “I majored in English. I studied a wide variety of subjects, and languages.”

“Well, you couldn’t qualify for the Master of Music degree here until you took quite a bit of remedial theory and composition.”

“Oh, I wasn’t planning to do the Master of Music; I’m applying to the Master of Social Work.”

“Then why did you want to audition?”

“Well, for voice lessons, for Seminary Choir, for solo pieces in chapel...”

“I’m afraid those are reserved for music majors.”

End of meeting. He never even asked to hear me sing.

Now my day was in turmoil. I'd been abruptly shut out of the whole music program without an audition and that pushy tour guide had finagled a date with me. Carla came to pick me up and I quickly filled her in on our way back to her apartment.

"You have to come with me," I insisted. I couldn't break the date because I didn't have the boy's phone number. I was just supposed to meet him in front of the student center. But I also couldn't go alone. Carla knew nothing of my troubles at university, but she could tell I was genuinely panicked. I was not going to get in a car with a stranger. In the end, she drove all three of us to a restaurant close to campus and then dropped him back at his residence hall. Not the evening he had planned, but crisis averted.

Now I had a new dilemma, though. Did I really belong at this seminary? I sat alone in Carla's guest bedroom to process and ponder. The first day had gone so well. I got the sense that SBTS was a shiny, happy place where scholars explored important questions and students developed their hearts and spirits and as well as their minds, for service. Then, the second day was full of discouragement and discomfort. Maybe I would not be fully welcome here, as a singer as well as a thinker, a future minister of some sort. Maybe I would be bombarded with unwanted attention from young men. I would, I thought, be safe from sexual advances and assault from seminarians. I didn't want men pestering me for dates, but maybe I would meet someone here who would love me. Probably not. At some point I'd have to tell him about the assault and then I would be seen as damaged goods. Plus, these Southern Baptist guys would probably be just like the Baptist Campus Ministry guys, someone sweet and simple to marry. It was a small school, only about two thousand students. Eventually people would get to know me, and they'd leave me alone. Louisville seemed safe and lovely. In the end it was the social work faculty that drew me to Southern Seminary. In an ugly twist of irony, they were all soon to leave.

I was one of seven students admitted to the Carver School of Church Social Work in the Spring term of 1995. Within the first three weeks of classes, the Carver School began to fall apart. By the end of term, it was closed.

I was prepared for the relocation to Louisville to be somewhat stressful. I had moved a lot in my childhood, I was used to being the new girl, but this would be the farthest from home I'd ever been. There would be no driving back to Dade City any old weekend. I had no family here. I knew no one but Carla, and we'd never been close, and that wasn't likely to change. I expected to be a bit lonely. I expected to have to work harder for A grades, since I was entering a graduate program, in a subject area I'd never studied before. I expected I might struggle with nerves as I adjusted to being around a lot of young men—the student body was about 80% male—and continued the process of recovering from the violence I'd experienced in Gainesville. I anticipated these stressors, these challenges, and I had a plan: find a new counselor, therapy group and a new church home, as quickly as possible. Make friends, and keep all the pushy boys away.

I knew that a seminary was not the same thing as a monastery. In fact they are nearly opposites. A seminary trains priests to go out into the world and serve, to create missions and churches and schools. A monastery is where monks live in quiet simplicity, praying, worshipping, doing homely work like building or writing or making cheese. I knew I was headed to a seminary, to train to offer my gifts to a congregation, a community of ordinary, lay folk. But what I really wanted was a monastery, or rather, a convent. I wanted to live in a quiet, terse little room with a single window and a cross on the wall. I wanted to pray six times a day and go to chapel at all hours to hear the scriptures and chant the psalms. I wanted to learn all the great hymns by heart, maybe write a few myself. I wanted to do all this while living in a small community of devout believers, whose every thought was

for God, or for each other, whose character was beyond reproach. I hoped for sisters in faith to rival my college Bible study group. I hoped for brothers in Christ who would not think to trade on faith to get dates. We would live all together on a green and noble campus, in purity, in harmony: not drinking, not cursing, not shagging or raping. Not listening to secular music or watching R-rated movies. I would be safe there, safe to heal. We all would be. We would care for one another like family. We would be closer than any church family could be. That's what I was expecting from Southern Seminary.

In the first two weeks, I located a counselor and a sexual assault group at the Center for Women and Families in downtown Louisville. They operate on a sliding scale, which allowed me to pay only two dollars a week for services. I made friends in classes and visited churches and picked one pretty quickly. I made friends at work, too; Romano's Macaroni Grill had transferred me; I was singing and hostessing three nights a week and started making good money right away. I had a job and a car and major medical insurance and a huge apartment on campus. It all felt very adult. Then there were stressors I had no idea were coming. There was no way I could have been prepared.

First was the onslaught of unwanted male attention from every direction. I had thought I would feel safe on campus—I had a new phone number, new restraining orders against both M and J, and I had pressed the seminary to install a peephole in my door. But as with the stalking in Florida, as soon as I plugged in my phone, it started ringing. The very first day, I got three calls, from three different men.

“You don't know me, but I heard you're new and I wondered if you might want to go out with me this weekend.”

“Hi, you don't know me, but I'm sure you're looking for a new church; why don't you let me take you to mine on Sunday?”

“Hi, we’ve never met, but I have two tickets to a ball game...”

I hung up, shaken—how did these people know my name and number? Then there were a few who skipped the call and actually showed up at my apartment. Nothing rattles me more than an unexpected knock at the door. Look through the peephole and there’s a guy holding flowers. *How sweet, I think, Mom sent me flowers for a housewarming present.*

I open the door, the guy blurts out, “Hi, you don’t know me but I heard you like music and I have two tickets to the opera for tomorrow and I thought you might...”

No. No. No. No. No.

Another girl might have been flattered. I called campus security to find out how these strangers were finding out who I was and where I lived. Beyond that, what gave them the idea that I wanted dates? And why would they assume that they would like me, that I would like them, that I would go anywhere with a stranger? I’d come here specifically for peace and safety. I’d come here to be among God’s people, who would surely treat women with respect. Another woman might have been excited, to be so sought after. But why so much seeking? And why was it so random? On what basis were these young men seeking me out? Talking to security, I learned that every year, the seminary publishes a facebook of all the students, faculty, and staff. Next to your ID photo, they print your name, birthdate, school program, phone number and address. How did they know I was single? Married people have their spouse’s name in parentheses (which somehow seemed awful to me). Cute girl? No parentheses? Let’s give her a call!

Now, I had always been uncomfortable, even offended, when guys decided they wanted to date me or anyone else on the basis of appearance alone. I had been taught that what was real was on the inside. I didn’t trust anyone who thought they knew anything about me just by looking, and here they only had a single photo. I believed in being introduced by mutual friends, in being friends and

sharing people and activities in common. Today, I hope I would be more gracious, but then I was mostly shell-shocked. I was scared and angry and I reacted out of fear and anger. I insisted the seminary change my phone number and make me unlisted. I got more calls. I was freaked out and furious—they'd gotten my number at the switchboard. Every year I had to go through the same thing; demanding the switchboard not give out my number. They never seemed to understand. *Oh, we redid the Rolodex. Oh, we switched to a computer system.*

Looking back, having gone through more therapy, I understand I was suffering from PTSD. It was hard for me to relax in my own apartment. I had flashbacks, nightmares, I startled easily and dissociated or panicked when hugged by a man. When classes got into full swing, the unwanted attention continued. It all seemed unfair, and infuriating. I was just here to study, to heal. I was going to need more protection.

The second source of unexpected stress and distress was the vicious political divide that gripped the campus. I don't know how I could have been prepared, in those days before the internet. I didn't follow state or national politics, and I hadn't been aware there was any such thing as church politics. I wish my pastors had given me a heads-up, but a lot of people ignore denominational power squabbles. The fact was, my new grad school was set to explode. From the very first day I stepped on campus, I was confronted with labels and categories I'd never heard before, expected to label myself and to oppose and denounce everyone with a different label. The first students I met, two young men my own age, whom I'll call John and Joey, asked me point-blank, within ten minutes of our being introduced:

“So what are you? Liberal? Conservative? Moderate? What?”

I was at a loss. What did that mean?

“Do you believe the Bible is the holy, inerrant, inspired, infallible Word of God?” they demanded.

“Doesn’t everybody?” I asked.

They relaxed, smiled, looked at each other.

“She’s with us.”

As far as I could tell, there were two main groups on campus. The moderates, whom their opponents called “liberals,” believed that Scripture was full of contradictions, and they tended to support social justice issues, though it was not clear to me what that meant. They were long-standing faculty and staff members, and many students, concentrated in the schools of Christian Education, Church Music, and Social Work. The conservatives, whom their opponents called “fundamentalists,” believed the Scriptures were perfect and authoritative in every way, and tended to focus their energies on making converts. They were found among the younger, newer faculty, the administration, and the schools of Theology and Missions. The seminary had a new President, Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., who was in his 30s had taken the helm two years earlier and was busy turning the institution quickly and firmly to the right. Several faculty members had already quit or been asked to take early retirement. With each semester, the student body, led by John and Joey, was growing more conservative. As the ratio of left- to right-leaning students was beginning to tip their way, the conservatives were increasingly vocal, in the classroom, and in student government and in their churches. Tensions were running high.

At the start of each class session, conservative faculty members would pray blessings on Dr. Mohler and the trustees. Moderate faculty would pray blessings on the Dean of Church Social Work and pray for Mohler to come to his senses. In chapel, each faction claimed its own territory, conservatives sitting front and center, moderates at the back and in the gallery. One day we had chapel

outdoors because there was a bomb threat. Dr. Mohler got several death threats. There were sit-ins outside his office. A man dressed as the Grim Reaper marched up and down the quad. The crisis centered around a vacancy in the faculty of Church Social Work, the first since Mohler had assumed the Presidency. He and the trustees were imposing harsh new restrictions on any new hires, insisting that they oppose divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, abortion, and women's ordination. Every faculty member now had to publicly sign, with a quill pen, no less, the Abstract of Principles, a document created by the seminary founders vowing they would teach in accordance with the Scriptures and with core Southern Baptist beliefs. The search committee found a candidate they liked, but Mohler and the trustees would not approve the hire. Suddenly, moderate faculty members from every school were resigning in protest. Suddenly, the whole Carver School was collapsing as the devoted professors who had attracted me to the seminary all resigned. Suddenly, Southern Seminary didn't have a social work program at all. I wouldn't be able to get an MSW degree from a Christian perspective. No other such program existed. Some sixty-five years earlier, my paternal grandfather landed at Ellis Island the day before the stock market collapsed. He came to the Land of Opportunity, but Opportunity had packed her bags. Like him, I had just gotten here, but the thing I came for was gone.

The developments at the seminary were big news for the city and the region. Because nearly every seminarian is required to serve a church during his ministerial training, every Baptist church in the area—and they are legion—is affected by seminary and denominational politics. Somehow, though, I felt little connected to the Carver School turmoil. I was not yet taking social work classes—I was getting my seminary equivalent of Gen Eds: theology, Old and New Testament, church history, Christian ethics. I had connected right away with an active group of conservative students led by John and Joey, who were themselves intimately connected to the Mohler administration, and it was obvious where the power lay. Instinctively, I ensconced myself in their midst.

Let's be clear. I'm a Good Girl. I like approval, from male authority figures. It is my instinct to be compliant, so much so that I have dated really bad people because they told me to. So much so that, one time early on in our relationship, when we were leaving a restaurant, my now-husband, in a perfectly neutral, non-bossy way, told me to get in the car and I immediately put my box of leftovers on the roof of his car and jumped in the passenger seat and buckled up as fast as I could and then sat there, numbly wondering what had just happened. (He doesn't tell me what to do anymore—invitations and suggestions only, no instructions.) But as much as I like to be compliant and cooperative, I do not suffer fools. I will not listen to people who don't know what they're talking about, or who don't have a good reason for doing what they're doing. I will not go along with just anyone—they have to be fairly smart and impressive. And Dr. Mohler is what New Englanders would call “wicked smart.” He reads several books and about a dozen journals and magazines every week on all sorts of subjects. He was only thirty-five when he took over the presidency of the seminary. He's an impressive public speaker and can carry a conversation with almost anyone about almost anything.

Dr. Akin. Dr. Dockery. Dr. Walker. Dr. Gushee. Dr. Newman. Dr. House. Dr. Block. I was suddenly surrounded by more well-educated men than I could shake a stick at, and the things they knew and thought about and wrote books about were the things that seemed to matter most. They were good men, good husbands, good daddies, who spent their days in worship and contemplation of the highest object of study. They would be my fathers now, the uncles and big brothers I'd always wanted and never had. I promptly built marble pedestals for each of them and installed them in my imagination around the quad. I prayed for them and their families every night.

In some cases, I got to know their wives and children. Of all the Mohler-hired faculty, Newman (New Testament) and Gushee (Ethics) were the youngest, and had a certain leg up on popularity. John and Joey had taken over my class schedule when I first arrived at seminary, making

sure I took all the “right” classes, which meant I was signed up for the same classes they were, which meant I’d be exposed only to conservative professors and inoculated against all the liberals on faculty. For example, the year before, Dr. Mohler had fired a well-loved, tenured theology professor who had been struggling with his beliefs about God allowing evil and suffering after his wife died a drawn-out, painful death. John and Joey and my new mentor, Dr. Douglas C. Walker, the Dean of Students, would not want me studying with that guy. We were all safer now that he was gone.

I quickly got attached to Newman and Gushee. Newman was sharp and sarcastic, to the point of being mean, but it was an angry time. He read a passage of the New Testament to open class each day. The passages were not related to the lecture; they seemed to be selected only for inspiration. It felt like he was challenging us each day to live up to the high standards of Scripture, of Jesus. He also dressed really well and jokingly claimed that his spiritual gift was accessorizing. Dr. Gushee was not well-dressed and might not have owned a single accessory of any kind. He was gentle and humble, funny in a soft-spoken, self-deprecating way. He dressed like someone who gave a significant percentage of his income to the poor, or like a man who would rather spend his clothing budget on his beloved wife and children. Both were probably true.

That first term, Spring of 1995, both Gushee’s and Newman’s wives got pregnant—the Newman’s first and the Gushee’s third. All of us students were excited and happy. It felt really wonderful to have some joyful news to focus on in the midst of all the chaos and negativity. It was my first experience of someone I knew being pregnant. I enthusiastically added Leanne Newman and Jeannie Gushee and their unborn children to my daily prayer list. Around this time, I started getting even more serious about prayer, and what church folk would call my “prayer life.”

I took advantage of the semi-monastic setting on our quiet campus and began to pray in every circumstance—before studying, while walking the quad at night, at the thought of any person or news story. I prayed not only for my church and its ministers, not only for family and friends and political

leaders of national standing, I spontaneously and continuously offered prayers of thanks and intercession for my co-workers at Romano's Macaroni Grill, and for all the commuters I passed on the way there, and all commuters everywhere. If I walked by a man holding a squalling baby, I would pray for both of them, and all babies and parents of babies to have an easier day. Sometimes I still do. When I hear a siren, I stop and pray for the emergent situation, for the emergency workers, for those who are suffering, for their friends and family members. I pray for their peace and wellness, that they would suddenly feel a calm come over their hearts, that they would be surprised by grace in that very moment.

I suppose, looking back, that I became a little obsessed with my favorite professors having babies. Maybe it was the idea of new life coming into the world. Maybe it was the idea of these noble, intelligent, godly people raising their children in a noble, intelligent, godly environment, Maybe I identified with the babies, imagined myself being raised on the campus of Georgetown University, where my father had taught when I was young. How loved I would have been if we could have stayed right there, lived near campus, if I could have been home-schooled by college students and faculty. I would have been so happy. I would have felt so safe. I could have been even more extraordinary, and yet felt so much more at home than in the life I really had.

So I was devastated when it was announced in chapel that Jeannie Gushee had miscarried. I hadn't known women who were pregnant, and I'd never really thought about miscarriage. What could be more horrible, having life turn to death inside you? I started crying and couldn't stop. I slipped out the side door of the chapel and walked back to my room. I was horrified. I believed life begins at conception; I believed abortion was murder. I could not understand God's letting an unborn baby die. The Gushees were wonderful parents. They deserved a baby as much as the Newmans or anyone else

did. Suddenly it didn't matter anymore that the Newmans' pregnancy was continuing fine. It was just unfair. And now the Newman baby would always be a reminder of the Gushees' loss.

Most distressing was that the miscarriage had happened three days earlier. All weekend, I'd been cheerfully praying for a baby that was already dead. Somehow, I had failed. The scriptures say the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective. In the King James translation, "the prayers of the righteous man availeth much." Mine availed nothing. Maybe I needed to be more righteous. That week, I started fasting.

We were learning about fasting in one of my classes, from a book about spiritual disciplines. The point of fasting was to spend the time and energy you would ordinarily reserve for meals, in prayer. Adding the sacrifice of fasting in this way would get God's attention, and add power to your prayers by showing him how serious you were. Clearly, there was no better time for me to start. The atmosphere on campus was growing more poisonous; the pastor and music minister of the church I'd just joined were resigning amidst a sex scandal; and I was going to have to decide soon whether to leave and pursue social work at a different school, or stay and change degree programs. I decided to eat nothing for a week.

The first day, I felt determined. The second day, I felt shaky. The third day, I felt weary, but then I found a high, an elation. It had to be the Holy Spirit. I was being heard, my voice was being amplified to the heavens by the discipline of my fast. Surely by the end of the week, things would be resolved amongst the faculty. Dr. Gushee wouldn't look quite so devastated. I would have clear direction for my life. That week became five weeks. Jesus had fasted in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. My new school, my new church deserved no less from me. After this, I would be a powerful prayer warrior. I would be closer to God, holy and purified by the Refiner's fire. I did not

know that I was making myself physically and mentally ill, nor that I was following a path walked by dozens of young women—medieval saints and Victorian spiritualists.

What I didn't know was that fasting can be quite addictive. After the first three days without food, the body goes into starvation mode, to prepare itself for a whole season of scarcity, and you actually experience an extended version of a runner's high. I had gotten to that point and mistaken the hit of endorphins as the Holy Spirit. It had felt so like a spiritual breakthrough, though. I felt powerful and light. I did not know my feelings; I did not know my body. Fairly well, I knew my mind and its abilities, but only in the realm of academia—I had little understanding of psyches, of people. I couldn't tell a trustworthy person from a rapist. I began to lose track of my hunger. I didn't feel hungry or thirsty anymore. I was like Hamlet, I ate the air. My body worked on its own. I was tired a lot and my back- and sitting-bones began to protrude enough that I had to lean forward onto my thighs to sit comfortably. My head lay on my desk through much of class. I had no thought of how rude that must seem, or how concerned others might have been for me, how ill I must have looked. I listened and wrote notes underneath my face, or to the right, and from time to time lifted my head to ask or answer a question.

Within a few months, it was clear I had a problem; my fasting got out of control. I loved feeling so light and clean. I loved feeling that I must be special to God, a super-faster, whose prayers were heard first, and answered straight-away, like priority shipping. Executive class. I felt I was turning into a sort of saint, growing my soul as the polluted flesh fell away. Holy girls and women in the Middle Ages allegedly lived for years on nothing but the Host—the Communion wafer that represents the body of Christ in the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, ceremony. Their condition was called *anorexia mirabilis*, a miraculous loss of appetite. I thought my lack of appetite was holy, too. And maybe it started out that way. But when I couldn't eat even when I tried, when trips to the grocery consisted

of me walking around taking items and then putting them all back, when my clothes began to hang on me and my beautiful long hair started falling out in handfuls every day, I knew I needed help.

First, I turned to Dr. Walker—I stopped by to see him in the Student Services office at least once a week. He'd been worried about my health too, and set up an appointment with a Christian counselor nearby. The seminary would cover my fees, he said. I met with Dr. E for a few weeks, but he wasn't much help. It was bothersome and emotionally draining to have to recap years of backstory for a new therapist. You can't just walk in and say, "So, I moved a lot as a kid and my father died and I got really upset about my professor's unborn child dying," (I was *not* going to talk to a strange man about my history with sexual violence), "and a lot of kids my age were murdered at college during my first week away from home. Oh, and now I can't eat. I'm depressed and exhausted. Go!"

No, it takes weeks of rehashing things you've already talked about with four other counselors, so there's no real help at all for quite a while. Dr. E took notes while we talked; he also recorded a session on tape. I was uncomfortable with both. I'd already said my piece "for the record." Therapy sessions were supposed to be private, confidential. What if someone else saw his notes or listened to the tapes? They weren't my property; I couldn't control them. It made me feel vulnerable, hesitant to open up. Hard enough that he Dr. E was a man—a bearded, white, middle-aged Christian man—the face of the patriarchy. The voice of authority. Then one day, Dr. Walker mentioned that E said I was doing well, making progress.

"Do *you* feel like you're making progress?" he asked. I suddenly realized that Dr. Walker was not just arranging payment for my counselling sessions—he was monitoring them, whether out of concern for my welfare or for his budget, I couldn't be sure. He'd called my therapist and asked about me. And E had answered him. Maybe Dr. Walker had seen his notes, or listened to the tapes.

"Yes," I said. "All kinds of progress. In fact, I think I'm ready to be done seeing Dr. E. I'm doing great now."

I never went back.

I didn't have another counselor for several years. The rape recovery counselors I could see for a dollar downtown were constantly turning over. They were grad students themselves, doing a rotation in trauma or community outreach. They changed every semester, and that was just too hard for me. In my experience, pastoral counseling was either advice or a workbook with Bible verses to memorize. Mostly it was the pastor holding your hand and praying out loud for God to help you.

“Lord, please free our sister Olga-Maria from this demon of anorexia. Help her, Father God, to see herself as you see her, as a beautiful young lady, and help her receive food as the gift of your bounty.” Not super helpful. I felt I was on my own.

I did realize that I'd had trouble eating all my life, and that fasting had long been a coping strategy, the way I dealt with stress. I also realized that my dramatic weight loss and exhaustion and inability to feed myself were likely linked to the sexual assault, though at that point, I did not recognize the date rape incident as connected to the series of less violent assaults that began in my childhood. One afternoon, I had a sudden flash of memory. I phoned the UF Student Health Center and asked for Sandy. Wondrously, she was there and had time to take my call.

“Sandy,” I said. “I just remembered, from sitting in your waiting room, that the receptionist always says, ‘Eating Disorders and SARS.’ Third floor isn't just sexual assault recovery services—you all treat eating disorders, too.”

“That's right,” Sandy said.

“So, they're related?”

“They can be. How are you doing, Olga-Maria?”

“Well, I'm having a hard time eating. I've lost twenty-five pounds that weren't really extra.”

Sandy wasn't surprised. She said it was quite common for survivors of sexual assault to respond either by overeating, to hide their body and their sexuality under bulk, or to stop eating, shrinking their body and sexuality back to pre-teen proportions. Both disorders were signs of depression, she said, and compounded it, making the sufferer feel worse about him or herself, in turn making the behavior pattern harder to reverse. Sandy encouraged me to take care of myself in little ways, to journal, and to read the book Sexual Healing Journey, and the book Boundaries. I lit some candles and journaled my heart out. But I couldn't bring myself to read those books, even to look for them at the library. The word "boundaries" was one I'd heard a lot about, but I had no idea what it meant, or why boundaries, whatever they were, might be important. And I was not about to touch a book called "Sexual Healing Journey." Sex outside marriage was wrong. If I ever got engaged, I would get that book. Because the very idea of sex, even with a husband, made me feel queasy. Though I was quite sure no one would want to marry me anyway. I was too obviously damaged, and troubled. The word "journey" sounded hippie, and I didn't need anything sexual. I did, however, desperately want to find healing.

I was depressed and I knew it. Though my mood lifted now and again, there had not been a day since my father's death that I had wanted to be alive. Not-being always seemed preferable to being, at any given moment. I thought frequently about suicide, though I did not have the will to harm myself. I just wanted not to be in a body at all, and not to have to struggle. Being alive was such a struggle. It was exhausting, all the time. I also understood that I had been good at fasting partly because I had a long history of anorexic inclinations and behaviors, but also because it was easy for me not to want food. I didn't want much of anything. Besides, planning, shopping, cooking, cleaning: all the activities required to feed myself were dull and exhausting. There was no way the work-to-enjoyment ratio made sense to me. Anyway, I took vitamins. The bottle said it had 100% of all the essential nutrients.

It came as a terrible shock to me when someone told me I couldn't live on vitamins. We hadn't learned anything about nutrition in school. One of the cooks at Macaroni Grill, where I sang three evenings a week, offered to make me some food. I was looking puny, he said.

"Oh, I'm good," I replied blithely, "I took my vitamins this morning."

"What *else* have you eaten today?" he asked.

"Umm... Gatorade? But these are good vitamins—they have 100% of what I need."

He was confounded by my staggering ignorance.

"You know, those are *supplements*, right? They give you 100% of the vitamins and minerals you need *in addition* to healthy regular meals? Plus, your body can only absorb the vitamins and minerals if you take them *with food*." My facial expression must have been priceless. He made me sit in the back and eat a whole plate of pasta with meat and veg and cheese before I could go back to work.

I had seminary friends, too, who were concerned about my health. They started asking me what I'd eaten when I showed up to work out. Four to five days a week, I came to run a few laps and lift weights, maybe soak in the hot-tub when my low back hurt, which was often. If I couldn't honestly say I'd had at least I serving of protein and carbs that day, they would lovingly, faithfully, send me back home to eat. Or hand me a power bar and make me eat it right there. I recall these young men with fondness and gratitude. I lived alone for most of my seminary years, only briefly having a wonderful roommate who soon married, and thus no one to help me eat or to hold me accountable to take care of myself. It was hard to feed myself, really hard, but I could and would eat if someone told me to, or sat with me.

I lost some friends during these years, "when I was really sick," as I tend to say when I talk about my the worst era of my disordered eating. It was hard to live with me. Though I had the best roommate possible, she moved on and I lived alone the rest of my time at seminary, another seven

years. There was a boy I liked who said he loved me. I met his family; he met mine. But he didn't love me, really. When I asked for any type of encouragement, he refused it, said I "shouldn't need" that. Then he did a little research, talked to some men he respected, and decided that anorexia was an addiction I would never recover from, that I would never be able to cook, bake, or share meals with people as a wife should do. I think he wondered if I would be able to bear children.

"Your problem is bigger than me," he said, and ended our relationship. *It shouldn't be*, I thought. *It's not bigger than God, bigger than love.* There was an older woman on staff in Dr. Walker's office who fancied herself my mentor, too. I'm sure he told her things about me. Her response to my eating disorder was to take me to a fancy tea shop for lunch and tell me that this was the work of Satan. She was upset, not that I was ill, but that I must not be truly saved, since I was obviously so much in the devil's power. I tried to explain that anorexia was not a demon, but a flawed coping skill. I tried to explain that I was actually walking quite close to God, that I felt His love nearer than my breath, all the time. She wasn't going to believe a word of it and I was too tired even to take offence.

I did pray, constantly, for God's help to eat, for God to lift my depression and lethargy. I was functioning just fine, getting good grades. The hardest times were at night, and at the grocery store. I felt terribly alone and helpless, in the darkest place I'd ever seen. I knew anorexia was a slow, public suicide. It wasn't a demon—it was the part of me that wanted to die. It would be several years before the part that wanted to live got strong enough to beat her.

Sept. 26, 2014

Katie session 11:10-12:20 pm

I have been having bad headaches for over a month now. I've tried aspirin and ibuprofen; I've tried acupuncture. I am concerned that it might be a side effect of a bad Wellbutrin generic, but Katie says it's a Part. The pain is accompanied by almost constant heat at the forehead and the back of my neck up near the skull. I tell Katie that I've been calling it my "*faux* fever." She doesn't think there's anything *faux* about it. But I don't really have a fever, I protest. No, she says, you have a migraine. And when a Part manifests as physical pain, no amount of medicine will make it go away. We decide to focus on trying to talk to this hot-headache Part.

First, we mentally create a safe circle (I picture us being in the yoga studio) with the Resources: me, Katie, the Protector, the Nurturer, and my dog, Layla, then we invite the headache Part to join us. We anticipate some resistance from other Parts, and we get it.

Part 1 presents as a sensation of tension in the throat and chest. This seems to be a very young Part. She wants to lie in child's pose on a bolster with Layla nearby. Once she settles in there, she is content, and the throat and chest tightness softens and neutralizes.

Part 2 is skeptical about the whole exercise. She is not ready to join the circle, not without good rationale, and she does not trust grownups. She wants them to sit down in the circle, to be on equal footing. "Cooperation is *not* the default setting," she declares. She agrees to join the circle only when, through me, the adults tell her she doesn't have to do anything, that we will trust her inner wisdom to know what was best for her to do, at any and every point along the way.

Katie asks how I feel having this Part with us. I say that I'm glad to have her, glad to know she's present. I felt perhaps she'd been lost before. I remember growing quite compliant at times through childhood and young adulthood, but also that at times I have been able to challenge authority. I'm glad to know this irrepressible girl is still Part of me.

"Well, she's certainly very present," Katie says.

Katie asks if the first two Parts would like to go somewhere else while we work. Part 1 wants to hide in a willow tree on an island where no one knows where she is, so she'll feel safe. Katie says we can make her safe anywhere, and wonders if she'd like other people around in a safe way. The Part pictures a playground in a park, then the playground at school. There are other people there too, she explains, grown up and little, playing and hanging out. It's important to her sense of safety that others not be looking at her or looking to her, expecting anything of her. She takes several minutes to explain that everyone on the playground should be equal—boys and girls, adults and children, cool kids and not, rich kids and poor. It should be like when we have on uniforms, she says, we're ourselves and we're different, but you have to look at us the same. We all have to be on the same team. Katie and I agree with her, and she settles into the circle as well.

Part 3 is a fog clouding our way to the headache and heat. This is a Firefighter, concerned that I am not ready to handle what the hot headache has been holding. It stands aside when Katie and I remind it of our Resources. We also tell it that whatever memory or pain the headache part is holding has already happened—we have survived it. It's over.

Part 4, finally, is the hot headache. It has been wanting to come forward, which it shows by moving around. There is pressure and heat in the face, torso, rippling up and forward. The part is holding back tears, choking on sobs. Katie asks if the pain she's holding is her own or someone else's.

"Someone else's."

Katie asks her to look to her right in her mind's eye and see whose pain she's holding.

"...Mommy."

The Part starts to think about Mommy:

It's hard to see her in so much pain. She hurts. She's all alone—she has no Mommy or Daddy and now Papi is gone too. I need to help Mommy. Mommy's not good with feelings. It's just so sad.

The Part feels overwhelmed by her own sadness and Mommy's sadness. She doesn't understand that Mommy, as a grown-up, has other perspectives on emotions, other resources, other friends. Katie reminds us of the inner resources Mommy herself has, including her own deep wisdom and her unbreakable connection to her own parents and grandparents. Part remembers that Papi speaks to Mommy in dreams, that Mommy's parents and grandparents were good and that she probably still feels close to them. There is lots of weeping, choking—I feel I've been karate-chopped in the throat. My lips tremble, and suddenly I am sobbing; my throat feels squeezed shut, a horizontal line of pain like a knife or a sword going right across the throat, where you would gesture that you were going to kill someone. Such deep, deep sadness for us both. So much loss for Mommy. So much loss for me.

Slowly, the pain lifts, though the warmth remains. I believe the sensations will resolve completely as this Part relinquishes her share of Mommy's grief, gives it back to Mommy. I picture it as a red box with a little white label that says "Christine" on it. I picture myself giving Mommy back what belongs to her. Katie says when we have what is ours, we can move forward more freely.

CHAPTER FIVE

Despite the chaos of my early years at the seminary, I was physically safe there. The violence of the Southern Baptist community was far more subtle. The traumas were over, and I could get down to the hard work of healing, and dealing with the after-effects of what had gone before. I had done well in terms of finding myself a green and quiet place to heal. The seminary campus, once the conservatives settled into power, was unfailingly peaceful. I lived in an elegant dormer room with a large window nook overlooking a leafy neighborhood. Birds flew by and underneath my view, which was mostly trees, and a few rooftops. My life was as contemplative as I had hoped it could be when I first came to Louisville. I woke, and prayed before I got out of bed. I prayed as I did my hair and makeup, while I listened to Morning Edition on NPR. I prayed for all the people and situations that came up in the news. I prayed before studying, that God would help me learn what I needed, what He needed me to learn. I prayed before classes, before meals, before bed. I walked around the quad and prayed for my community most evenings. I wrote in a prayer journal every day, wrote hymns and poems. I kept the Sabbath by not studying on Sundays, trusting instead that God would see to it that my six days of work were enough.

The campus had two chapels then, and three dedicated prayer rooms. Most days I would wander into one of the chapels, sit in the center pew, take up a hymnal and sing. Perhaps my most elevated sensations of faith were in those moments, especially in the round Dillard Chapel. Half its circle juts into the center of the building, and half juts out into the quad. It has a huge, round, stained-glass window depicting the Holy Spirit descending as a dove, flanked by the four gospel writers

represented by animals: John as a rising eagle, Mark as a winged lion, Matthew an angel, Luke a winged ox. It is lit by sunlight in the daytime and floodlights in the evening. The rounded shape of the chapel space and its lofty height make the acoustics brilliantly clear. I went there when I was feeling expansive, but more often, when I was feeling “hard pressed on every side.”

*Abide with me, I would sing.
Fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens.
Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me...*

*...Be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Leave to thy God to order and provide.
In every change, He faithful will remain.*

And I would sing until I felt better. It always worked. God was there, and I could find Him. He would listen. I could draw near.

I kept close to God in all my activities: my singing, which I continued to study through the Music Department after all; my exercising, reading, writing letters to friends. This was all part of my quest, and my sense of calling. My goal was to be holy and pure, powerful in prayer and full of God’s wisdom. On the first day of Ethics class, Dr. Gushee had introduced the idea of teleology—that we could look at the Christian life not only as a list of do’s and don’ts but as a set of goals that can never be fully met—you can refrain from cheating and stealing, but you can never be pure enough. We would never be done with justice, honesty, generosity, love. It was the most inspiring message I’d ever heard. It rang deep inside me. I had always been good at checking off the boxes on the “to do list” of being good. I didn’t drink, I didn’t smoke; I didn’t have sex, I didn’t dance or listen to secular music.

I tried not to curse. Now I had a new standard—utter holiness. I thought I was pretty good at it, too. But I tried to fight the sin of pride.

I did well in all my classes, especially Greek and Hebrew, but Ethics remained first in my heart, and when I finished the Master of Divinity in 1998, I stayed on to do a Ph.D. It was meant to be with Dr. Gushee, who was the first to suggest this path for me, but he, too, ended up leaving, in protest against the Mohler regime. His own mentor, Glen Stassen, had been a Mohler casualty a few years back. So, the school brought in new ethics professors to teach us. I was crushed when Gushee left, but I trusted that our new faculty would be more than adequate. Quite a few of my male classmates, and two other women, stayed for doctoral work. The male students in the Theology department started dressing up for class, wearing suits and ties. They said Dr. Mohler expected them to look like professors, as if, at any moment, they could lead the class. I started dressing up, too. I was stepping up to varsity from the JV squad. I wanted to look the part. I dyed my long blonde hair dark brown, hoping it would lend me greater seriousness, and also that it would make me look more Puerto Rican. I suspect it only made me look like what I was—a young woman searching around for an identity.

I also got a new job, away from the seminary and the restaurant business. I became the manager of the children's department of a large independent bookstore, Hawley-Cooke. I had two workers under me, both women, and our own managers were mostly women. Compared to the seminary, and even compared to Macaroni Grill, the bookstore was a feminine sphere. It was a more diverse and liberal setting, certainly. The workers included a Jewish woman and a Muslim man and lots of Democrats. There was a young man whose father had been an SBTS professor fired by Dr. Mohler. There were no Southern Baptists, besides myself. But we cultivated an atmosphere of acceptance. If someone came in looking for a book on satanic cults, we could not blink an eye. The

only time I did was when a very, very tall man came up to me, stood quite close, looking down and in a deep voice asked, “Where are the books for wizards?”

There was a sweetness to working with and for young readers, interacting with them about the books they loved and what they might like to read next. There was a sweetness to having my adult responsibilities, my full-time job, be organizing read-aloud times and visits from Pooh Bear and Madeline. The greatest challenge was to sustain the physical energy and emotional steadiness to work more than thirty hours a week, when I was barely eating, and hurting so much inside. When I had been at the restaurant, I had gone in the walk-in freezer when I needed to calm and center myself. Here, I walked back into the warehouse, amongst hundreds of cardboard boxes filled with books and magazines, just to breathe and wonder at the fact that I was doing this. I was doing *this job*, a real job. I was doing well at it, too—at something that wasn’t school or music.

In fact, I was involved in what felt like the most significant work of my life to that point. I was changing children’s lives every day, simply by handing them good books to read. My favorite part was the Mother-Daughter book club I started. I gathered young girls aged ten to twelve by talking to my regular customers. We met on a monthly basis to discuss our book and pick a new one. The bookstore offered discounts on the books, and the publishers paid for their drinks at the store’s café. We sat in enormous leather armchairs around a fireplace in the travel section—six daughters, six moms, and me. My hope was that this group would help the girls find community with other readers, a new way of connecting with their mothers and other women role models (including myself), and building their enthusiasm for and skill at reading in an engaged way.

My only rule was that the girls talked first—on every question or topic, I wanted all the girls to have an opportunity to speak before we heard from any of the moms. I had the sense that if an adult spoke first, or if I offered an opinion, it might squelch the enthusiasm of one or more girls, stop them thinking for themselves, or lessen their confidence to offer a different view. The club was a

terrific success. We read wonderful, mostly new books, mostly novels. I worked hard to craft a flow of thought-provoking questions ahead of time that would challenge the moms and daughters both, and allow us to explore the generational differences in our perspectives.

The main character in E.L. Konigsburg's The Moorchild feels very different from the people around her. Do you think everyone feels different or like they don't belong sometimes? Is everyone actually different, or are feeling and being separate things?

On Carol Fenner's Yolanda's Genius: Let's talk about the word "genius." What's your definition? What are some different ways to be intelligent? Are there intelligent people you wouldn't find in a book club? What is the role of family in this story? How do you know?

The club was special to all of us, but it had particular value for me. As a woman, I was not allowed any teaching role at the Southern Baptist churches or seminary. Thus, Hawley-Cooke became the venue for my first foray into teaching. It was up to me to set boundaries and deadlines; I got to develop my skills at drawing people out, at listening deeply, at pacing and focusing discussion, and balancing different participants' energies. And I loved it. I was good at it. It worked, with very little effort on my part. I was slowly turning into the professor I would later become, discovering my vocation and building confidence and self-esteem, not just in pre-teen girls, but in myself. For the first time, I felt I had something real to offer, perhaps even in front of a classroom.

Back at the seminary, I was taking a class designed for those of us who were going into teaching, which covered the history of higher education in America and various issues related to teaching college. It was actually taught by a young woman, an adjunct faculty member brought in solely for this course, and there were a few women students in the class. Toward the end of the course, we were assigned group projects. My friends Dawn and Amy and I were assigned to report on *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, by Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy

Goldberger, and Jill Tarule. I'd never heard of this book, but it was several years old at that time, an important study into how women relate to knowledge, truth, and authority. What I discovered in the reading was quite surprising—here, for the first time in my academic career, was a textbook about me.

Women's Ways of Knowing was written in the 1980s by these four women: psychologists and sociologists, who met each other at an academic conference and bonded over how their fields were entirely shaped by research done by men, studying other men. How, the authors wondered, would the conclusions and assumptions accepted as standard by the academic community be different if that same research had been done by women, studying other women? They crafted exactly such a project and their results included some interesting new findings. Essentially, they discovered that women—of all ages, socioeconomic levels, racial, religious, and academic backgrounds—inhabit and move through five “ways of knowing,” five ways of relating to knowledge, truth, power, and authority.

First, many women, especially the young, undereducated, or abused, start from (and sometimes remain in) a position of silence: all knowledge and truth and authority are outside them, far from them, held by others. Asked what she knows, the silent woman will have nothing to say.

Received knowers see knowledge as lying outside their own minds. Truth for them is in the hands of authority figures, so that even what they know of themselves is limited to what others say of them. Asked about herself, the received knower will say things like, “My mother says I'm shy,” or “The doctor says my child is hyperactive.”

At the next level is the subjective knower, who has discovered—sometimes through a traumatic experience, sometimes through formal education or simply wider experience of the world—that authority figures can disagree with one another, and that she knows some things herself. Suddenly, all truth becomes a matter of opinion, and one opinion is as good as the next, so that authorities are at least somewhat suspect, and her own truth is primary.

The procedural knower has made the further discoveries that some opinions are better than others, that experts do exist, and that there can be objective as well as subjective truth. She works to create a framework, a procedure, for sorting out her own views on a subject by critically examining the findings and opinions of others.

Finally, the constructivist knower is able to be not just critical but creative, thinking outside the box, as it were, to create new knowledge—this is the most advanced level of thinking, rarely achieved by people other than artists and academics.

The women on my project and I were fascinated by this thesis. We had never thought about thinking, nor had a framework for assessing it. At our first meeting, on a landing in the women's dorm, Dawn was practically skipping. She had identified strongly with the subjective knower.

"I do this! I do this!" she said. "I think about things and then I watch myself thinking about it, and I think about how I'm thinking."

The experience she described was completely foreign to me. Amy could see that she was herself a procedural if not always a constructivist thinker. I had actually been quite discouraged by the reading, because it was abundantly clear to me that although I was a very smart woman in graduate school, I was still a received knower. It was my habit to take a poll before making an important decision; I gathered others' opinions rather than forming my own. I never questioned authority, in a text or in a person. In fact, I relied on them completely, to make sense of the world. I confessed this to Amy and Dawn, who, like good friends, rushed to my defense.

"You're not like that," they insisted. "You're definitely a subjective knower at least."

I had to laugh.

"The fact that I need you to tell me what kind of knower I am just confirms that I really *am* a received knower."

Their further efforts to reassure me served only as added confirmation: Dawn and Amy responded by criticizing the book, arguing that the authors had interviewed fewer than 200 women for their research, that it was only one theory, that I didn't have to judge myself by it. I had not been able to think that critically. It would be years of hard, hard work before I would be able to. For me, at that point, if the book or professor or newscaster said it, it had to be true. But in that moment, I started moving toward a new way of knowing. And now I had some vision, an idea of the shape my growth could take.

At that point, although I couldn't see it then, there were plenty of signs that my maturation—intellectual, social, and emotional—was significantly delayed. Not only did I not know how to think for myself, I had a hard time maintaining relationships, except with my professors and seminary administrators. These were so structured by the institution, I could navigate my way clearly. Socially, however, I was fairly isolated. My female friendships seemed unstable: girl friends would sort of float into and out of my life in ways that seemed random to me, as much of the world seemed random. I so wanted women to be friends, to be sisterly with, which is a Christian ideal after all. But the other Christian ideal of early marriage and motherhood took precedence with the seminary girls, and they dropped away one by one as they paired off with husbands. I didn't date much, and when I did, I was not treated as an equal. The seminary guys were far less aggressive than college guys, but I was still uncomfortable with sexuality generally. At the same time, I was also overly emotional—my feelings were intense and easily sparked, and I had a very hard time describing or controlling them—except for anger, which I could not even acknowledge, let alone express. Every morning that I woke up, I wanted not to have awoken. I pushed through the days, but the nights were marked by deep depression and fear. I sucked my thumb at night. I slept hugging a stuffed bulldog I'd received as a gift from my college R.A.

At Hawley-Cooke, we got a lot of free books from publishers. One of the ones I snagged as soon as it came out was *The Secret Language of Eating Disorders*, by Peggy Claude-Pierre. Her thesis was that anorexics suffer from more than low self-esteem; they lack a coherent sense of self altogether. This idea resonated powerfully with me. I recognized it immediately as my own truth. From the outside, I appeared high-functioning and solid, but inside I knew how fragmented and fragile my spirit was, how unsure. One common phrase I'd heard many times over the years but never understood was, "Be your own person." "What on earth did that *mean*?" Reading Claude-Pierre, I realized that my own lack of self was the root of my confusion at this idiom. Whatever else I was—smart, pretty, accomplished—I was not my own person. I was everybody else's person, everybody else's Olga-Maria.

I would listen to any opinion other than my own, which was not to be trusted, which didn't feel real yet. Any decision I was contemplating required input from at least three or four sources—friends, mentors, a pastor, my mom. On decisions like what classes to take, what books to read, what friends to have, what boy to date, what movies to see, how to vote, I really did take a poll. And I acted upon the results, discounting the effects or outcomes for myself. I had feelings of shame and guilt over the sexual abuse I had experienced, but those feelings went largely unacknowledged. I still felt a vague sense of danger, in almost all circumstances. One summer day, the Seminary Ambassadors were on retreat, and deep in the Kentucky woods, we were being led through a trust-building exercise on a ropes course. The guide was giving us an introduction to how the course would work, the safety harnesses, how we would communicate with one another.

"This is a safe place," he said. "You have to trust one another and keep one another safe." I suddenly started shaking and weeping and couldn't stop. His words, and the situation, made my condition starkly clear. I didn't feel safe anywhere, ever. It seemed impossible for me to feel safe. I sat on the ground in a ball while the other ten or so Ambassadors went through the ropes course.

So, when it came time to go across the ocean to live for three months in Oxford, England, I was not excited. I was extremely nervous.

There was only one professor in the Ethics department now, Ben Mitchell, who was finishing his doctoral dissertation when he came to teach at Southern. Because he hadn't yet completed his own degree, he was not qualified to supervise other doctoral students, so the provost had to find another, better-established man to head up the program and direct my dissertation.

Somehow, he found Dr. E. David Cook, one of the most eminent ethicists in Great Britain, a Scotsman, and a fellow of Green College, Oxford. Green is one of the newer, twentieth century colleges of Oxford, all grad students, primarily medical. David (as he requested we call him) specialized in biomedical ethics, and was not only widely published but taught all round the world with half a dozen universities, and, in his spare time, ran a think tank out of Oxford City centre. Nonetheless, David Cook agreed to come to Southern Seminary and take on doctoral students—just two at first, myself and a man my own age named Pete. Because David was, amongst other things, a Baptist (English, not Southern), he could affirm the seminary's founding principles and pass Dr. Mohler's stringent doctrinal code.

It was arranged that David would come to our campus for a few weeks in the summer, that Pete and I would go to him in Oxford in the fall, and we'd email work back and forth in the spring. Working with David was unlike any academic experience I'd ever had or heard of, and tremendously difficult. His stated goal was to turn me into "a Ph.D. sort of person," he explained—a critical thinker who could engage at the highest levels of discussion even on topics she hadn't studied. My job was to meet him once a week in his office at Green College with a publishable essay of any length explaining, evaluating, and applying the reading assignment he'd given me.

David's standards were the most rigorous. Not only did I have to do my own thinking—I was only permitted to read primary sources, no digests or responses from other philosophers—but I had to critique my own work as well as the text before me. I would leave David's office each week and go straight to the Bodleian Library to order up my new assignment. Since you can't check out books, you put in an order slip at the front desk and they'll bring it up from the vast subterranean archives by the next day. Day two, I'd sit in "the Bod," read my text and take notes. Day three, I'd come back, read further, refine my notes, and begin to plan out my response. Days four through seven were spent writing and editing, usually frantically making changes right up to the minute of my "tutorial" appointment. Although I had only one task per week, it was exhausting. I found my rhythm: I worked round the clock, writing for an hour or two, breaking to sleep, eat, or walk, then back to my studies. I couldn't leave them for long, my mind kept churning away, but I also couldn't sustain thinking at that level for long before I needed to rest.

I'd never studied philosophy before, and here I was "reading" moral philosophy at the doctoral level, at Oxford. Some of the texts were so difficult (Wittgenstein) I had to go find cappuccino and then pray earnestly for God to expand my mental capacities. It worked okay. I made B's. Other readings were far simpler, even life-changing. I fell in love with Thomas Aquinas and John Finnis, a contemporary Thomistic scholar at Notre Dame University. It was reading Finnis on natural law that I began to understand how unhappy I was, how much I had been suffering. I also began to understand that I could take concrete actions to help improve my condition. The main question at the heart of ethics is, "What is the good life for human beings?" According to natural law theory (Thomas expounding on Aristotle, Finnis expanding Thomas), the good life looks like the flourishing of individuals and their communities, and requires the protection and promotion of several "basic human goods": life (which includes health); knowledge; friendship (including marriage and all social relationships); aesthetic experience; spiritual experience; autonomy (making your own decisions on

your own terms for your own reasons); and play. These goods, or values, are universal—every person and culture either enjoys them in some form or other, or fails to flourish to the extent one or more goods is neglected. Immediately, this idea had enormous appeal. It was clear and organized and thorough, it had the virtue of addressing cultural relativism, and it included all religions. I could easily apply it to my own life and see where, why, and how I was falling short of flourishing.

In terms of life, I was still not eating much or well, so I lacked energy to pursue the other goods. My friendships in England would likely be temporary, and those back home were inconstant, and contingent on both parties maintaining the same rigid beliefs and practices. Spiritual experiences I had in spades, but I was weak on aesthetics. I had a hard time, depressed as I was, appreciating beauty in music or art or myself, anywhere except in nature. Recently, I had neglected my vocal training and completely given up the violin, piano, and choir. The idea of play having intrinsic value made sense, but I rarely did it. When I exercised, it was to shape my body a certain way. I read for fun, but mostly to educate myself in higher culture. I read *literature*. And though I was single, and lived alone, and my family made no demands on me, I had little to no autonomy. I had relinquished much of it to the institutions of the church and the academy. They told me what to read, how to think, how to dress, when to eat, how to spend my time. The hours of my days were filled. There were more answers than questions.

It was in Oxford that I was first able to escape, a little, from the narrow tyranny of that religious patriarchy. It was there, in a land that had known powerful queens and a female prime minister, that I met a woman and saw her become a priest. It was she who took me to coffee and explained that women played a far greater role in church history than I'd been led to believe. A woman had founded St. Aldate's church, she said, and the cathedral across the street. A woman (later sainted) had prayed for Oxford, and the Black Plague was turned back at the city walls. What were they teaching at my seminary? Six credit hours of Church History and not a single woman empowered by God to do great

things? I should read Gillian Cloke's This Female Man of God. I found it at the Bod next day and devoured the pithy text, which outlines what women were doing during the time of the "Church Fathers," in the first centuries CE. I learned that women had been serious Bible scholars from the beginning of Christianity, translating Hebrew and Greek into Latin alongside Jerome; they had been evangelists and philanthropists. I learned that the Scriptures might not hold the last word on women. And I learned I could not trust the professors and the administrators of the Southern Baptist Seminary.

Wherever one went in Oxford, there was vigorous debate and any idea was valid if it was supported by strong reasoning—the gender of the speaker was irrelevant. I don't know if I would ever have fully found my own mind had I not been forced by circumstance to study there. As it was, my thinking and my writing (which I came to understand were the same thing) improved steadily over the weeks. New cuisines—French, Indian, Vietnamese—enticed me to eat again. Museums and free concerts drew me back to the arts and helped me see beauty again, to find joy in my senses and in the camaraderie of shared experience. I found a measure of improved flourishing there. And despite my trepidation about leaving the US, coming back was the harder step; re-entry. Dr. Cook had warned me I would be changed by the work we did together, but there was no way I could know on the front end what that meant, how it might go.

(Non) Katie Session

Between sessions, I try to do Katie-work on my own, at home. I rock on my front-porch swing; I listen to bilateral music on my headset; it moves rhythmically from the right ear to the left and back, like Kate's "tappers." I pick two leaves on the pear trees in the yard and look from one to the other as I swing. I find that trance-like state and try to contact whatever Part is giving me heartburn or a headache or clutching at my throat. Sometimes it doesn't work very well—some Parts might not trust me enough to talk without Katie there. But other times, I really can make contact.

I found a Part once who was really upset about Papí—dreaming about him over and over. She continually dreamed that he was alive. He kept coming back home, trying to reconnect with her, be part of the family again. One morning, after a dream like that, I decide to sit with her and try to offer her some help. I try to listen, to understand where her dreams are originating.

"Where do you think Papí is, sweetie?" I ask.

"Well, ... he could be anywhere."

I realize suddenly, that, from her perspective, this is true. She never saw her father's dead body, not even a framed photo of him next to a closed casket. She closed her eyes one night to go to sleep and the next morning, he was gone. *He could be anywhere.*

I decide first to offer her the Nurturing Resource, to empathize with her. Without words, I mentally sit down next to her and send her images in my adult mind. As a child, I start to realize, I had no idea what cremation was, how the process went, but now I do. Together, now, we picture the ambulance coming to the house, two or three emergency workers checking Papí's pulse and breath, giving him shocks to the heart with a portable defibrillator. They declare a time of death, write it on a

clipboard. Have Mommy sign some papers. Then the EMTs scoot Papi's body onto a rolling stretcher and take it to the ambulance, drive without the flashers on to take him to the morgue. Another team with another stretcher, a gurney, it's called, I tell her. Someone comes from the funeral home to take his body there, and rolls it up to a very, very hot, deep oven. They push his body into the oven and collect the ashes to put in a jar.

We go through this series of images again, as I reassure the Part that Papi couldn't feel the shocks, he couldn't feel the oven, because he wasn't really there anymore. He was gone from his body. *It didn't hurt, not a bit*, I have to promise her over and over.

But we still haven't answered the question. "*Where is Papi?*" He could be anywhere. So I put on my philosophy professor hat.

"Okay," I tell her, "Let's approach this logically. We know that Papi is dead—he's not walking the earth, living in another town. He would never leave you on purpose."

This is not convincing. She knows now that he did in fact leave another, earlier daughter and son, on purpose, and start another family. I present her with three options I think she might understand. Either he is Somewhere—heaven or hell or some other afterlife sort of place, or he is Nowhere—dissolved completely, or he is Everywhere. She does not believe for a minute in the Somewhere option. The Nowhere option is plausible, but sad. What about Everywhere?

"What if he's Everywhere a little, kind of like dissolved but more like diluted...?"

"Okay," I say.

"But he's some places more than others," the Part insists.

"How do you mean?"

"He's more present with the people whose lives he touched. He's more with me and

Mommy and Cooper; he's more with his students and co-workers. There's just more of him in certain places that he loved than there is other places. Like a concentration of Papi particles." I like her idea.

"Let's go with that."

CHAPTER SIX

In fact, it was a bit of a rough landing, particularly the second year, having completed my coursework and coming home to Kentucky to study for comprehensive exams and write my dissertation. All told, I'd spent seven months in England, made a dozen new friends, and written hundreds of pages on everything from Hegel to xenotransplantation. Whatever else had changed, I was certainly no longer on the Southern Seminary wavelength. I could suddenly perceive, as if through a new pair of glasses, the pervasive and insidious sexism of the Southern Baptist Church, sexism that was borne out oh-so-clearly at the seminary. In England, I had begun to teach undergraduates, privately and unofficially, about the Bible and biblical theology. Students from St. Aldate's church were drawn to me somehow, and spent time during the week asking me questions over lunch or tea. Sometimes they brought friends. Sometimes they took notes. But back home, I was not permitted to teach, not even Sunday School, except exclusively to other women. Not even boys over twelve. Certainly not at the Seminary or its Bible college, though all my male counterparts did. "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man." Thanks, St. Paul.

I had been so on the cusp of full flourishing—being well, doing well, ready to give back by sharing what I'd learned. It hadn't bothered me as much before I went to Oxford, but now it was intolerable. I had met the stringent standards of an Oxford don, but in Louisville, they didn't want anything I had to offer. Well, I could teach women-only classes at a local church, but that would be to admit some lack of qualification on my part, and to endorse the policy of sex segregation. I had gone from one church to the next, but those that had more liberal views on women had more liberal views on everything else, and weren't so welcoming of seminarians.

Coming home from my second fall term abroad, I was determined to pursue the basic human goods. I dove back into music, joining the Seminary Choir and Oratorio Chorus. I travelled seventy-plus miles to Lexington every week for voice lessons with an amazing professor at the University of Kentucky, who helped transform my technique, allowing me to sing the most difficult Baroque repertoire, which I loved. As I began eating more regularly, I had better energy to pursue the activities that suddenly were more exciting than they'd been before. My depression dropped away rather dramatically. After years of praying God would remove it, there was a moment in worship when it seemed that He did, but I found a terrible anxiety hiding underneath. I brought back from England a newly questioning mind, and a more empowered personality, focused on being authentic and independent—maybe, someday, even free.

In my last few years at Southern Seminary, I began to find more of a role in two churches at the same time, one old (Highland Baptist) and one just starting out (Sojourn Community). At both, I found male pastors who were open to letting women lead—I got to sing, teach, lead prayer, and even preach—and open to their parishioners receiving psychotherapy outside the church. It was at these two churches that I met the friends who would show me the path to my deepest healing: therapy with a trauma specialist trained in EMDR, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing.

My friend Nicole, a grad student in psychology, talked to me about embodied emotion. She explained that most people experienced emotions in their bodies—they might feel anger in their clenched jaws, anxiety in shaking knees. It sounded odd to me, but I did recall a shaking-knees episode during an audition once. She went on to say that emotions could even get stored in your body, and get stuck there for years if you didn't express them, let them go. But I didn't see how one could release a feeling, or what would make it go away. I certainly couldn't summon it as a skill. And it seemed

pretty important. Nicole described an exercise where she has the client lie on a big sheet of paper and trace their body's outline, then fill in with words, colors, and images the places they felt different emotions. I could not imagine being able to do that—in my mind, my white paper outline remained a blank. I was sure I didn't feel emotions in my body. I suddenly recalled one of my past therapists struggling to get me to name any emotion at all.

“What do you feel?” she would ask, over and over.

“I think this,” I would say.

“But what do you *feel*?”

I had no answer.

Maybe I didn't feel. No, I was certain I had feelings, and strong ones. I would get panicked in a crowded room and have to leave; I could get terrified in a grocery store, by all the shelves of food. I was definitely still grieving my father's death. And I felt hopeless a lot of the time. I could identify emotions—I just could not yet locate them in my body. I still wasn't fully inhabiting it. That would take more time.

My friend Harper and her husband were both counselors, and SBTS grads from the pre-Mohler era. I asked her about this sense of not feeling my body—could she tell, just by looking at me? Watching me sing in choir or walk around her house? She could. Well, what did it mean, did she think? Was it a big problem? Could it be fixed? Harper said she had noticed two contradictory things about how I inhabited my body. I did not seem fully present in it, nor fully aware of it, where I was in space, but at the same time, I was quite sensual. What did that mean? Harper explained that she could tell I was awake to beauty, I enjoyed using my senses—I loved music, I loved petting her dog, I always noticed her bright nail polish. That meant my mind and heart were connected to the five senses that

bring information to the body. If I could work with a trauma specialist, Harper thought, I could heal the events of the past that had distanced me so from my physical self.

I had already been through years of therapy, but Harper explained there were lots of philosophies, approaches, and techniques, some of which might be dramatically more effective for me. Her husband had had a powerfully healing experience with a newer technique called Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing. It sounded weird, she admitted, but could accomplish months' or years' worth of therapy in one or two sessions. In EMDR, the therapist guides the patient's gaze steadily right to left, over and over, as the client remembers a past event. It activates the subconscious like REM sleep or hypnosis, but the patient remains awake, aware, and fully in control. There is not manipulation by the therapist; the patient remembers the whole session. Harper told how her husband had resolved a decades-long phobia in a single hour of EMDR. The simple process had led back to the original message of irrational fear, and he was able to diffuse it, disarm it of all power in his present life, even somehow to release the hold it had exerted in his memories of the past. Part of the magic of EMDR, Harper said, was its ability to reach the source of past suffering and make things retroactively okay.

I had to try this. Harper gave me names of two local psychologists trained in this new technique. One was a devout Christian who specialized in family therapy. What I understood at that point of my psychological needs was that the loss of my father had colored all that came after it, and left me vulnerable to sexual aggression. Maybe this therapist, Ellen, would be able to help me actually feel better. And as a fellow Christian, I trusted she would respect my faith.

Ellen's office was across the river in Indiana—small and dusty, crowded with children's toys on the floor and framed Bible verses and inspirational sayings on the walls. Her Ivy league diploma was more impressive. She herself was sweet and warm, very attentive to me. I outlined for her my

story, who had recommended her and why, as she took notes without interrupting. She asked just a few clarifying questions and then said she could already diagnose me, with PTSD—post traumatic stress disorder. I had thought PTSD was something only war veterans had, but Ellen said that rape and the childhood loss of a parent were traumas, too, and my nightmares and lack of body awareness were clear symptoms of PTSD. She also told me more about EMDR, but stipulated that she'd like to have more sessions of classic talk therapy first, to get to know me better before starting EMDR. We would both know when the time was right, she said.

A few weeks into therapy, the right moment arose. I was working part-time at the front desk of a tennis club located in a big, beautiful, old house. The courts were attached to the back of the house, so when people were playing, it was completely quiet at my desk. That morning, I had a panic attack at work, during one of those quiet times: I'd never had one before, but I knew what they were. My heart was pounding; I felt shaky; I couldn't catch my breath. I was suddenly completely terrified for no reason, and then it went away. I got panicky again driving across the bridge to Ellen's office in Indiana. I chanted the alphabet out loud in the car to get myself to the other side. I told Ellen about my morning and she said, "I think we can use EMDR to find out why you panicked."

The first step was to recall the panic itself—exactly where I was, and how it felt—to bring up that very recent memory as clearly as possible. When I could call it up, Ellen said, we would spend the next few moments listening to that panic. I was to follow her first two fingers with my eyes as she took my gaze from side to side, and stay focused on whatever arose from my subconscious. I worked to focus, first on the memory of that panic, stepping back into it as she took my eyes back and forth for maybe ten to twelve seconds. I guess she could see my expression change when I suddenly "heard" something from my subconscious, because she stopped.

"I'm alone in the house," I said.

“You’re alone in the house. Okay, stay with that. Follow that. You’re alone in the house.” Her hand started moving again.

“I’m trying to make toast,” was my next pronouncement. “But I’m scared. I don’t know why I’m scared.”

Ellen encouraged me that I was safe right now, in her office, and could stay with the sentence, “I’m trying to make toast.” My eyes followed her hand.

“My face feels funny.”

Ellen didn’t even pause. “Your face feels funny. Okay, keep going—your face feels funny.”

Suddenly, the whole memory came clear.

“My face split—it feels different left and right.”

“It feels different?” Ellen asked.

I sat back. “I remember what this was.”

The right side of my face was panicked and keyed-up, experiencing everything I was doing (making my bed, brushing my teeth) as happening too slowly. “Hurry up! Hurry up!” it would say. “Omigod-omigod-omigod!” The left side would watch the right side and scoff. “Slow down. So what? It doesn’t matter. You’re so stupid. Shut up.” My right face felt like my eyebrow was raised and my mouth open; on my left face, my eyebrow felt lowered, the lips pursed and curled into a sneer. I had to check my reflection in a mirror. It was curious, and concerning: every time, I wondered, which face I would see. Would I look like Panic Face or Scorn Face? Could I look like both simultaneously? But the girl in the mirror had no expression. No one was there. It was years before I found any sort of language to describe my experience, and muster the courage to tell anyone. One day, I finally confessed to my mother, “Mommy, I feel schizophrenic sometimes.”

As I recounted this vivid memory, Ellen nodded again and again. I remembered Harper saying, “You want to work with a therapist who has heard it all before. Nothing you could tell Ellen could surprise her—she's been helping trauma survivors since before you were born.” It felt good to know I was in the hands of an expert. She wasn't fazed, or shocked, or upset. She didn't look at me like I had to be crazy. She knew exactly what we were dealing with.

“Do you know the term, ‘dissociation?’” she asked. I didn't.

Dissociation, Ellen explained, was a natural tendency of the human mind in times of distress. The ability of parts of the conscious and subconscious mind to split away to perform separate functions happened on a daily basis for most people to a slight and temporary degree. I read later that dissociation is even related to the feeling of *deja vu* (the strange feeling oddly familiar) and *jamais vu* (the sense that the familiar has suddenly become strange). In all these cases, the individual is having two or more distinct experiences at the same time. There was a spectrum, Ellen said, from daydreaming to *deja vu* to the sort of dissociation I'd experienced as a child to multiple personality disorder, which we now call Dissociative Identity Disorder.

I was not crazy, she reassured me. Dissociation was, is, a perfectly natural, protective response of the mind to trauma—particularly in children, who are less empowered to alter painful circumstances, have less language to talk about them, and, I learned more recently, particularly in girls, who are less likely than boys to act out, and thus release, their negative feelings.

But, I protested, my father didn't die until I was fourteen; the dissociative episodes began at age five or six.

“Nothing bad had happened to me yet,” I insisted.

“We won't worry about that right now,” Ellen said. “Let's focus on this scared little girl. What would you like to say to her?”

I did have lots of helpful new information to pass on, to console my younger self, but I wasn't sure it would translate to my five-year-old self, who was making toast.

"I think I want to tell her she's not crazy. I think she'll believe me. I want to tell her God loves her and that she will make it through just fine."

"That's good!" Ellen said. "She probably feels really alone in this scary episode of her face changing, and hearing voices. You can also offer her the comfort of knowing she's not alone—God is with her, and now that she's asked us for help, you, the adult Olga-Maria, are there with her, too."

Ellen guided me back to the memory of being in the kitchen, so that I could feel again the presence of my scared child-self.

"Can you sit with her somewhere?" she suggested. "Get down on her level?"

"We'll go out the back door and sit on the back stoop," I said, and imagined us doing just that. Ellen guided my eyes from side to side.

Sitting on imaginary steps in the imaginary sunshine, I put my imaginary arm around the imaginary shoulders of my imaginary little self. I let her lean into me as I told her that I was okay now, the episodes were over, that she wasn't crazy, that God was real and loved her and would take care of her. When the session ended, I felt completely calm, and so did my inner child.

It really did feel, as Harper had put it, "retroactively okay"—not as though the dissociation had never happened or that it had not upset me at the time, but as if I had never thought of myself as crazy. The inner burden of having drawn that initial conclusion had been lifted, by Ellen's explanation of dissociation and especially by our extension of that new information to my inner child self. It was amazing—one of the best feelings I'd experienced. Not a high but a new level of normalcy; an extra measure of what it surely felt like to be like everybody else.

I continued to work with Ellen, using EMDR, for another few months. At that point, I did not remember the earlier episodes of assault I have recounted here. I really had defined my self and

assumed my psyche was defined by the twin traumas of my father's death and being raped. Ellen had offered no theory as to why my dissociations had started in early childhood. She helped me use EMDR to send some comfort to the younger me of my memories, but that was as far as we got. Even this little amount of work, though, was enough to lift my spirits considerably. It was enough to let me finish the grueling work of the dissertation, and graduate with my Ph.D.

At a certain point, I became less comfortable with Ellen. She was intensely religious, in a fundamentalist way. A lot of the reassurance she offered me was along the lines of, "God has a plan," and "Everything happens for a reason." Once she brought up demons as an explanation for some of my suffering. And I, for the first time, spoke up to redirect the session in a more useful direction. I told her I'd rather talk about the actual people who had hurt me, and the actual traumatic events that actually took place. She followed my lead, but Ellen lost a lot of credibility with me that day.

Ironically, working with Ellen, particularly the EMDR session around my dissociation, brought me just enough courage and independence to leave the church altogether. Over my last year at seminary, I grew increasingly disillusioned with the rampant sexism of the Baptist church and started visiting an Episcopalian church headed by a woman. It was still not a good fit. I began to realize I just didn't want to hear about the Bible anymore. I figured I was burned out. I'd heard of that happening, especially seminarians, even to students at Bible colleges. I had been at Southern a long time, almost ten years of classes and chapel and church and study; it made sense to me that I could burn out. Over the weeks and months following graduation, it became clearer that my faith in the church was slowly fading. I still felt close to God (whom I began addressing more as "Holy One" than "Father" or "Jesus"), but a distance was growing between myself and my Christian friends. Sometimes I felt terribly sad about this; sometimes I felt mostly anger and frustration, especially at the ignorance I'd been kept in by the sister institutions of the seminary and the church. For example, when I graduated with my Ph.D. in 2003, I still believed in day-age creationism and intelligent design. I believed the New

Testament had been written by the historical disciples of Christ—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, and Paul—though the texts were in Greek, no one had pointed out that these men were not Greek. They were Jews, three of them fishermen, who spoke Aramaic, read Hebrew if that. Paul and Luke likely had some Latin. I felt really stupid when I put that together, around 2005.

I'd been purposely kept from knowledge of women's role in church history. I'd been kept from any understanding of spirituality that wasn't Western, hierarchical, patriarchal, heterosexist. I believed what Mohler and his ilk preached from the chapel pulpit—that Christianity was under attack, that American culture was perilously amoral, that secular humanism was the enemy. But the more time I had for Oxford to sink into my consciousness, the farther I moved, not from the divine but from Christianity, from religion full stop. Friends drifted away or pushed me away, most of them, in the end, because of the next step in my healing process—sexual awakening.

Without Ellen's help, I don't think I would have been ready for a romantic and eventually sexual relationship. I was thirty when I graduated with my Ph.D., still a virgin, without a boyfriend. But when I interviewed to teach Ethics part-time at nearby Bellarmine University, I happened to meet the love of my life, man of my dreams: poet and painter Frederick Smock.

I felt Fred's energy before I saw or spoke to him. I was standing in the hall outside his office, waiting to talk to the philosophy chair, who was running late. I was looking at the philosophy department bulletin board when I felt him walk behind me into his office—a little voice inside my head (which I then interpreted as the Holy Spirit) said, "Turn around and go talk to that person and you will feel welcome here." So I did; just walked up to the door that said "Prof. Frederick Smock" and introduced myself to the very handsome man sitting at his desk. He invited me to sit and talk until the professor I was waiting for arrived. We talked around thirty minutes, mostly about creative writing—Fred was poet-in-residence at the time, teaching all the creative writing classes. I left feeling

not only welcome at the university, but encouraged in my writing. More than that. As I walked back to my car, I phoned my mom and left her a brief voicemail.

“Mom, I just met the most amazing man. I *have* to get this job!”

Bellarmino did end up hiring me as an adjunct instructor in both philosophy and (thanks to Fred) English. Although the university is staunchly Catholic, I found it a far more egalitarian setting than Southern Seminary. I immediately connected with colleagues in both departments (I was not interested in teaching theology, which was just as well since in 2003 the Theology faculty was exclusively Catholic), who offered me support and guidance in my teaching and encouragement in creative writing. Under Fred’s guidance, I began to publish my poems in well-regarded journals, to earn grants and writers’ retreats. In short order I had a chapbook and was giving public readings. Frederick had been until recently the editor of *The American Voice*, a feminist literary journal highlighting the work of women in the Americas. Fred had been a feminist longer than I had known the term. In fact, he was a more thoroughgoing feminist than I was—though to be fair, he did have a seventeen-year head start.

As dear as other friends had been, Frederick quickly became my best friend, and the subject of fluttery fantasies. He likes to say that authoring my sexual awakening was his best work. He was navigating his way out of a deeply unhappy marriage, so we took several years to get to know one another and allow our love to grow slowly, before we decided to marry, ourselves. Not only did I find that Fred’s personality, intelligence, and character were beautifully suited to mine, but his enlightened attitude toward women enabled him to offer exactly the special support I needed to feel safe in beginning to build a sexual relationship. Specifically, there were two moments when Frederick was able to effect deep healing with simply his own sincere words. The first instance came in the midst of a conversation early in our relationship, when Fred said, “I see you as my equal.” I was staggered, not only by his statement but by how much I needed to hear it. How rare that view had been in my years

in the Southern Baptist church! I remember stopping, looking him in the eye and saying, “Say that again.”

The second instance was more intimate, but I include it here because it was and is immensely important to my healing from sexual trauma. Again, it was a very simple statement. We were “canoodling,” as we liked to call it, some months before we fully consummated our relationship, and Fred paused, looking up at me with one hand on my breast.

“I love your breast because it’s you,” he said. *Whaaat?*

“I love your body because it is you,” he explained. “This is no one else’s breast, it is not the concept of breasts in general—it is you. I want to touch your body and be close to you with my body because it’s you.” He was trying to explain intimacy to me, and it was beautiful. I wished in that moment that I had understood it long before. But I had never before been truly loved, it seemed.

Sometimes I still wonder how much I do understand the profundity of his expression of sexuality with me, the intention I was gradually able to receive and to return. Frederick was fifty-one at this point (I was thirty-four), and he readily admitted that in his younger years he had pursued sex more for pleasure. As a mature adult, and in relation to me, sexual pleasure was inextricable from partnership. Mutuality, respect, and authentic connection were our essentials. We playfully employed the Antioch Rules, a set of guidelines created in the early 1990’s by Antioch College to prevent sexual offenses on campus. Basically, it requires asking verbal consent before each sexual activity. We decided it was terrifically sexy and fun, and turned out to be very helpful in my recovery. I used to flinch at touch, panic in a full-body hug if I hadn’t initiated it. As Frederick and I moved toward intercourse (after our engagement) , we did go back to the book [Sexual Healing Journey](#) to help us navigate the minefield of trauma memories held in my body. There was and still is no telling when I will dissociate, how far away I’ll go, which Part will come forward, or how long she’ll stay. There’s no telling exactly what will trigger a dissociative episode, but our essential goal was for me simply to feel safe at all times.

The counselors at the rape crisis center at University of Florida had said sex should always be safe, mutual, and respectful, that either partner should be able to stop any contact or activity at any time. As it is, that journey has been a long one, with some unexpected turns. After Fred and I had been married for several years, I began having severe pelvic pain during intercourse. It became increasingly difficult and painful to have sex. Thankfully, I had some general awareness, from ads in women's magazines and posters in the women's locker room at the gym, that my experience was not unusual. I did some research, met with my doctor, and learned that I had vaginismus, a condition which is unsurprisingly common in survivors of sexual trauma. It involves involuntary tightening of the muscles of the pelvic floor, which causes burning, stinging, or stabbing pain during intercourse, or can even make penetration impossible. I felt embarrassed and awkward; I felt I couldn't talk about my experience with any of my friends. I ordered a kit online that came with a booklet of instructions, a DVD, and a set of half a dozen graduated dilators, starting as small as a tampon. It took several weeks of practice to work up to the size I needed to comfortably accommodate my husband. Even when I was ready to work with him, it was a process. I wasn't frightened of his sexual organs per se, but I did feel uncomfortable with it. It seemed to make demands on me, though of course Frederick did not.

The reason sexual intercourse was possible and desirable for me now was due in large part to the generous, frank nature of our marriage. From early days, we felt there was nothing we wanted to hide from one another. My mother noticed this, and called it a "radical openness." We make space for solitude in our life together, essential for two introverts—but we share nearly everything. We read each other's writing; we play guitars together on the porch; we cook together, entertain together, even counsel and marry other couples together. I have my yoga and my girlfriends. Our tastes in music, film, food, and reading overlap but we enjoy freely the areas that do not. But nothing feels real until we've found a way to share it.

Frederick and I speak all five “love languages” together, fairly constantly—we communicate and strengthen our connection through physical touch, loving words, acts of service, and quality time every day. Gifts are somewhat less frequent, but I would count the little finds at the grocery store, the habit of bringing home little indulgences from rounds of errands or trips away from each other. Frederick and I found early on that we were so compatible, our energies meshed so well, that we could write in the same room, at the same table. We also found we hated being apart, which was nothing we’d experienced in prior relationships. On a typical day, we’ll wake together, share a tiny bathroom getting ready together, go to work (at different times, perhaps but to the same tiny office), come home within hours of each other. At home we tend to go our separate ways, to different rooms in the apartment but we feel together we can interrupt each other for anything without creating friction. We love to have friends over for a drink or a meal, but we must be together. We call it the “with-ness protection program.” If faculty meetings or social obligations crop up and threaten to keep us from each other or tire us out, we’ll implement the program. Frederick will decline making new commitments, saying, “Olga-Maria and I like to guard our time together,” or, “I’m afraid our calendar won’t allow it.” Sometimes, with a smile, but not really joking, he’ll say, “Have you *seen* my wife?” as if anyone who had would not dream of asking him to be anywhere but home. Put simply, Frederick and I flourish in each other’s company. We understand each other deeply and delight in creating a life together that includes travel and friends and the freedom to develop our gifts in new directions.

With Fred’s support and encouragement, I’ve taken acting lessons, worked with a (speaking) voice coach, performed in plays, studied stand-up comedy, and yoga. All of these actually, were undertaken as means of controlling my anxiety. As I began teaching at Bellarmine in 2003, I also began having stage fright when it came to singing, and mini panic attacks right before my college classes. I definitely had anxiety about my relationship with Frederick as well, in the first year or so. Besides the falling-in-love jitters, there was a great deal of stress during his divorce—I lost every one of my church

and seminary friends because they opposed divorce absolutely. In Matthew 19:9 Jesus says, “I tell you, if a man divorces his wife and marries another, he commits adultery.” Suddenly, in their eyes, I was an adulteress, just for dating someone who was in the process of divorce. My roommate forced me out of our apartment; I got terribly ugly emails and voicemails from people I’d considered my closest friends. They were quite eager to believe gossip and eager to condemn me. Even after we married, they would not accept us, I knew. I felt nervous and jittery all the time, felt like I was being watched and judged. I tried anti-anxiety meds and they helped dramatically, but I also decided to try yoga.

My first experience of yoga, on the advice of wildly enthusiastic friends, was a Bikram class, which for those unfamiliar is a series of twenty-three poses done twice each in a 105° room. It was brutal, but illuminating. The students faced a mirrored wall, like in a dance studio, and because of the heat, wore minimal clothing. Within a few minutes, I could see that several people who looked unfit or heavy to me were actually amazingly strong, flexible, and/or able to balance. I struggled with almost every pose, and felt suffocated by the heat. When the class ended, I was weeping and nauseated with panic. I forced myself to return, to make it through one session without breaking down. Then I could quit, and find a tamer, more humane yoga practice.

I joined a gym and found good yoga classes there. I knew they were good because the teachers clearly knew anatomy, gave alignment instructions, and I never got injured. I started building strength and muscle tone in new areas that hadn’t been developed in the weight training I’d been doing for years, and the ballet training I’d left off years before. My hands and wrists got stronger; I developed more flexibility and strength in my neck and shoulders. Best of all, my mind felt clear during and after; my body felt simultaneously engaged and relaxed. I took level one and gentle yoga classes, two or three times a week, and found that they left me feeling like I’d had both a workout and a nap. What better use of my time could there possibly be?

When I came to Bellarmine University, I discovered that several faculty colleagues were practicing yoga at a nearby studio halfway between my apartment and the office. The studio, Infinite Bliss Yoga, was run by a recent graduate of Bellarmine's English department, a young woman named Dara. Dara was very sweet, a zaftig little Buddha of compassion, with masses of long, dark, curly hair. I think every one of the students was devoted to her, not because she demanded it (she was not at all demanding), but because we craved her approving smile, touch, words. I went to one class a week at Infinite Bliss and two at the gym until my membership expired. By that time, I was sure that yoga was the best workout for me, and the only one I needed anymore. I was also starting to believe, because of Dara's physique and teaching, and those of others, that softness in the female body was acceptable, even lovely. Although some people have had their eating disorders exacerbated by yoga, mine was slowly alleviated. It took several years, but I began to feel my feet on the earth, feel my poses from the inside out. I started to fully inhabit my body.

In 2005, Dara moved away and sold the studio to a couple from New York, Nate and Allison. They brought a new style of yoga called Anusara, which, in comparison with the quite general instruction I'd had thus far, focused far more on proper alignment in each pose. Anusara also involved a radically positive philosophy of life and the human condition. It would transform my entire worldview.

The basic philosophical idea of Anusara is that the divine exists in all things, and that we, as humans, because we have the highest capacity for rationality and reflection, have a unique opportunity to recognize and celebrate our divinity. Nothing in the universe is intrinsically evil, and certainly those events that are harmful to any given species or group do not represent some sort of divine punishment. The only lesson in pain is what we choose to take from it. Because there is no God, *per se*, there are no "shalts" nor "shalt nots"; there are no "shoulds" in practical or moral terms. Each person is completely free, and completely responsible, to make her own choices, to discover what works for

her, and what is life-enhancing. This is a fairly radical view, and I enjoy explaining it to people who come to our studio for the first time—we believe that the body is not a problem, I tell them, that the mind is not a problem. We don't work to subjugate or control or transcend them. We believe the body and the mind are tremendous gifts, and that yoga presents us with a set of tools we can use to engage the mind and body more skillfully. The physical practices (*asana*), breathing practices (*pranayama*), and meditation practices of yoga simply help us enjoy and enhance our experience of being embodied.

It is likely fairly obvious how different this mindset is compared with Southern Baptist doctrine. There is a reason that church leaders, including Dr. Mohler, firmly oppose yoga and don't want their parishioners practicing it. But yoga is not a religion in itself; in my view, it is a spiritual discipline that helps people connect with their sense of the divine through the body and the breath. Over the past twelve years or so, I have moved farther and farther away from the church, and deeper into my yoga, mainly because this radically positive philosophy makes more sense to me, and is more helpful and hopeful to me than religion had ever been. In this yogic model, I am a full adult, and always treated as one. I began to see how Christianity treats its followers like children—bad children who deserve punishment and need always to be told what to do. In Anusara yoga, we are all equals, men and women, teachers and students. We have no need of gurus. No person or text holds supreme authority, and any structure or authority is something you choose because it serves you in that moment and you are free to discard it at any time.

My yoga practice has served me well in preparing me to do the somatic work of therapy with Katie. I can easily connect to my breath, to my feet, which helps me feel present and keeps me from feeling overwhelmed by emotions and memories from the past. I can actually feel that I am in my body. That probably sounds like a very strange statement to anyone who has not dissociated, or had an episode of depersonalization, when one feels that one is observing oneself, rather than actively participating in the actions of the body, the words coming out of one's mouth. It took me several

years of taking yoga classes once or twice a week to eventually feel that my feet were on the floor. My teachers used to come to my mat and press my feet down, press my hips and legs so they would root down into the earth. I worked to hug my skin onto my muscles and my muscles more firmly toward my bones, and my limbs toward the center line of my body until I felt strong and present.

Katie will sometimes direct me to notice places in my body that feel neutral, or warm, light, or relaxed. I'll find and describe them—a soft peach light on my right cheekbone, a yellow space on top of my left hand, maybe—and we'll make a sort of imaginary web of light between them, building a structure of calm as we locate positive or neutral sensations throughout my body, so as to have a safe container for accessing areas that are holding pain. A few months ago, Katie began implementing a few new ideas about Parts-work, and encouraged me to recall a time when I was very nurturing to someone else, when I felt grounded, and connected to my highest self. When I could place myself inside that memory (for me, it involved teaching yoga at my neighborhood studio), that Part of me became what we call a Resource, my inner Nurturer. We did the same to locate and connect with my inner Protector. All children need and deserve healthy, generous adult caregivers to nurture and protect them, Katie said. I could see how this was a gender-neutral version of the paternal and maternal archetypes. I had not always had access to all the nurture and protection I needed, but, in another parallel to my yoga philosophy, everything I need is already inside me. I can be my own archetype. Now that I am a healthy, generous adult, as Katie helps me discover my younger Parts and understand what they need, I am able to connect them with my inner Resources.

I also have a wonderful team of outer resources. I call them “Team OMC.” Essentially, they are a network of holistic health-care workers: Mike, my acupuncturist; Christine, Julie, and Deborah on massage; my doctor; my yoga teachers; and other allies, friends who understand something about what I'm going through and what I need. My husband is team captain, and Katie is our coach.

Katie Session

Friday Oct. 24, 2014

11:20-12:15 pm

It has been a rough two weeks—lots of physical sensations that I know are from Parts, what I call “interference.” Mostly in the throat, but also headaches and stomach pains, and moving sensations at bed-time. Lots of intensely violent dreams, including sexual violence. I have lumps on the top of my head, muscles knotted up under my scalp. Katie offers me tappers or music that goes from the right ear in a headset, to the left and back again. I pick music, just for a change from the tappers. I turn it down low. It’s piano, I think, with rain or flowing water in the background, too.

In the session before this, Friday, October 10, Katie suggested the lumps on my head might be messages from my ancestors. I told her that I had no felt connection to the ancestors I hadn’t met, including my grandmother, Olga. Today, I tell Katie I’ve been thinking a lot about race lately, but don’t know why. I did manage to massage my scalp intensively and get rid of all the knots—there have been three or four for at least a year or more. The main problem right now seems to be the Parts-pain, sensations in my gut (a line of deep pain, apparently muscular, that went vertically down the right side of my torso for one evening only), itches, twitches, and spasms that move around every few breaths and keep me awake at night. I’d like to get in touch with that, I tell Katie. I really want to figure it out, so I can get it to stop.

“Well, *someone* wants to figure it out,” Katie says.

I suddenly realize there's a Part that's come forward, a Manager Part, who likes to help and really likes to have answers. She thinks everything has an answer, and belongs in a category. And I suddenly know who she is—she's my eight-year-old self who is a page at the public library.

Part 1:

(Later that night, when I have time to reflect back on the session, I decide to call this Part Saraswati, after the Hindu goddess of learning, writing, music, devotion—and libraries. There is a Saraswati statue in every library in India.)

Katie wants the Part to know that she can take a break from working, maybe go somewhere and play, wherever she'd like, and with anyone she wants.

She's happy here, she says, and I tell Katie.

But Katie says the grown-ups are going to do the work now. *What grown-ups?* Saraswati wonders inside my head. *Katie?*

“So, she should just let you do your job?” I laugh.

“I'm happy to help,” Katie says, “but I was thinking of your own inner Resources: the Protector and the Nurturer.” *Oh.*

“Does this Part know about the Resources?” Katie asks. I shake my head, no.

I try to picture them, so I can make them known to her, but it's hard to get them to connect. The Resources feel far away. Saraswati is in the library in Virginia and they are in the yoga studio (where I imagine the Nurturing self arising) and the stairwell in Kentucky (where I connect with my Protective self). Suddenly, the Resources realize that they can move; they are free to go anywhere, to be with any

Part who needs them. They feel they can come to the library, and take Saraswati out on a “Grand Explore,” like Pooh-bear and Christopher Robin. That feels fine.

I want to switch to the tappers. The music now has chirping crickets and crashing waves and it’s so complicated, it distracts me. Katie says we don’t need to switch. But I feel I am struggling, terribly distracted.

“It’s hard to think at the same time; it’s hard to try not to listen to the music,” I tell her.

“Is it really?” she says. I can tell she doesn’t believe me. The music starts to irritate me more.

Lots of sensations are moving around through my body, faster than usual: I feel a sharp pain in my right ankle; pressure in the temples that seems to intensify right and left with the music; throat, chest, heart, twitch in right thumb; there are little itches. It seems that at any time if I tune into my body, I can find a little itch someplace.

Part 2

Suddenly there is a hard line of pain running horizontally across my abdomen. Katie invites me to listen to it. What does the stomach pain say? It starts to pulsate, and grow stronger.

It seems to say, “You’re not good,” I tell Katie, or “You’re not good enough,” or “not good in the right way.”

Katie says, “Okay. I’m going to repeat those back to you. Which one feels like the right message? What is it wanting you to know? ‘You’re not good,’ ‘You’re not good enough,’ ‘You’re not good in the right way?’”

“Not good in the right way.” Tears come.

The Part explains to us that she doesn't fit in with other kids; she doesn't like what they like. Sometimes she can't figure out how to please them. Grown-ups will come out and tell you, over and over. But kids will just laugh when you don't understand.

“Do the Resources want to say something to this little Part?” Katie asks. No, they can't think of anything.

Katie asks if she can say something to this Part, and we (I feel pretty blended with her) are nodding, yes. We welcome her help. Katie says something, but it's muffled. I push the headphones back from my ears.

“Could you say that again? I couldn't hear you.”

Katie asks what happened.

“Your voice went low and I couldn't hear you over the music,” I tell her. But she won't repeat it.

“What happened?” Katie asks again. I start to feel sleepy. Apparently, we've encountered a Firefighter Part who uses sleep to protect a triggered exile. And somehow, she has kept me from hearing what Katie wants to say to Saraswati.

Part 3

It takes me a few breaths, but I start to connect with the sleepy Part. (Thinking and writing about her later that night, I decide to call her “Maya”—for the Sanskrit name of the yoga goddess of illusion, who manifests the tangible world as a way of cloaking the intangible, so that we are not overwhelmed by the full reality of the divine nature of the universe.) Maya herself is not sleepy: she is always on the job, which is to cloak some of my emotional memories to keep me from being overwhelmed.

Maya *hates* being a kid; she doesn't trust grown-ups *at all*. They come in and make announcements, they make changes without asking you, and disrupt everything you've worked for. They ruin everything, she insists. I learn that Maya is twelve. She's a Part who has just learned that the family is moving from northern Virginia to central Florida in a matter of weeks, and she is terribly distraught. She doesn't like change, and now everything is going to change. Moving up to middle school was going to be hard enough here, with her friends. Now, she'll have to start all over, and she is sure it will be awful.

Katie wants to know if Maya can find comfort anywhere. Does she believe in any spirits or angels or ancestors who might watch over her and help her feel safe and loved as all this change takes place?

Maya thinks *No*, at first, but then, she remembers the angels in the streetlights.

Part 4

"We're always scared to be in the car after dark," a new Part tells Katie in a sweet, young voice. "So we scrunch down on the seat so our head is on the arm part of the door and our feet are pushed up against the baby's seat." I remember this clearly, and realize she must be six or seven if Cooper is in a car-seat. "That way, no one can see us, and we can't see the other cars."

"That sounds like a good idea," Katie says.

"Then, all we see is the streetlights going by overhead. And if you squint your eyes a little when you look at them, the street lights grow arms—they're like long wings—that reach out to the hood of the car, and help it go down the road, and then the next one reaches out, and then next one. They mark the path and keep you safe. As long as the angels are touching the car, it won't crash, and no one will crash into you and no one will try to break in and grab you out of the car."

Part 3, again.

Once the younger Part has reminded Maya of this potential source of comfort, she steps back.

“Maybe the angels are still there even in the daytime,” Maya thinks out loud. “They’re just invisible.”

“Lots of things that are real are invisible,” Katie says. I remember St. Exupéry: “What is essential is invisible to the eye.”

Katie says, “When Maya is ready—and not before, when she is really ready—I think the angels might have an important message for her.” I tuck that thought away for later, setting my intention to tune in to Maya and notice when she might feel “ready,” whatever that means. Katie can be mysterious. She seems to have special knowledge about me and my Parts. But I like that. I feel secure in her knowing just what I need. And it does feel good to let Saraswati go for a while, not to have to know and understand everything, all the time.

Thinking this through later, I come to understand that the Exile is actually the stomach pain; Saraswati is a thinking-Manager, a type of Part that serves the system by staying alert to new details and working to sort everything out, put it all in its proper place. She’s a regulator, an analyst, and, in the work of connecting to the somaticized pain of the Exile presenting in this session, a distraction. Any Part with an agenda is not helpful to the process of connecting to an Exile, and we have to ask Saraswati to step aside for a moment, find her somewhere else to be during our work.

And Maya, the Firefighter, is a protective Part that wants to keep the Exile from being activated. So she puts me to sleep or makes my thinking fuzzy, even plays with my senses to distract me from poking around the cave where she’s hidden this hurting little one. She is a fierce mama bear.

Even as I try to write about this episode, more than a week after the session, I begin feeling drowsy despite being well-rested; there have been aches, and pains, and itches. Right now I have a sharp headache, mostly on the right side. I'm going to turn on EMDR music on Youtube and keep trying to move forward. But Maya doesn't want me writing, I can tell.

Without Katie here, it's hard for me to figure out why. I've spent some time online watching videos about Parts-work, particularly a series of videos by Dr. Derek Scott, a Canadian psychotherapist. According to him, most people can work with their Parts on their own, without a therapist. I have a harder time with it, I think because I have so many Parts, and because they are little and traumatized. Sometimes, I can connect effectively, but never so consistently as when I'm with Katie. Often, the Parts won't even talk to me. I can get some of them to calm down, sometimes, but usually not the headaches and knock-out naps. I am starting to wish that my mother, my friends, my teachers, and former bosses had understood, or could come to understand, that I don't *want* to nap all the time. I am starting to understand that, while, as my mother taught me, sleep is a coping skill for distress, it is not always a conscious one. My Parts are strong. They can take me out in half a second if they sense the need.

CHAPTER SEVEN

So, the work of recovery continues. And the main conclusion I can draw at this point is that my sense of the truth of my life, of *the thing I came for*, keeps changing. New memories emerge; talking to family, I find that we each hold different memories, and have different feelings about them, and sometimes vastly different interpretations of their significance. Much of my life story thus far, and many of its key elements, look significantly different from where I stand today—in the light of my yoga practice, in the light of my work with Katie, than they did even when I began to consider writing about them, several years ago. Throughout the psychological work and the writing, I find myself constantly having to revise my understanding of my own story, of myself, of my family members.

Most significantly, my mother's influence now shows up larger and more vividly than I had imagined. The story I had always told was that I was like my father, and my brother Cooper was like Mom; the four of us divided into little Freudian pairs, Mom and Coop going outdoors to fish and hike, Papí and me going to museums and operas. As if Cooper were not an artist and a writer, like Papí was. As if I had not absorbed Mom's work ethic; as if I were not now following in her physical therapy path by kneeling down on mats to touch people and teach them and help them feel stronger and freer and more whole in their bodies.

Until the Parts-work, I had no idea how much of my mind was focused on pleasing my mother, how powerful she had been in shaping my character. In the genetic lottery, I clearly ended up with Papí's musical and intellectual gifts, and throughout my childhood, he deliberately passed on his passions for opera, film, comedy, politics, history, ethics, and civic engagement. Not deliberately, he also passed on a marked tendency toward anxiety and depression, addiction, and anorexia, which have

shown up in some way in each of his four children. From him we also probably inherit our deep moral conscience, our intolerance of lying, and our commitment to constant self-improvement.

And there are ways in which, especially as I age into womanhood, I find I take after my mother, her sister, her mother and aunts and great-aunts. We share low blood pressure, and wrist problems. I look more like Papí's Puerto Rican family members. I act more like them, enthusiastic and affectionate, tactile. But I am undoubtedly my mother's daughter as well.

When I was growing up, my Papí was my hero, my rock. He was certainly the largest, most powerful force in my little world. Six-foot-one and barrel-chested, with that deep, rich, opera-trained voice. (It wasn't until years after he died and I watched "The Lion King" that I realized his voice also had the distinct scratchy quality of blackness. The big papa lion, King Mufasa, voiced by James Earl Jones, sounded much like my father. I also realized I hated movies where fathers die.) Papí, as a person, though, is now far less idealized in my memory. He inspired me in innumerable ways; he also intimidated me with his bulk, his strength, his volatile temper that might result in a book or chair being thrown across the room. He could be extraordinarily patient, especially when teaching me to do something like paint a wall, or teaching me to understand something about how the world works. He took me everywhere that was important to him. And long after his death, I found that in my stumbling path, I was following him in ways I knew nothing about, consciously at least. I became a Christian before I discovered that Papí had been a minister for a while. I studied for my Ph.D. in Ethics before I found out he had once been accepted into a similar program and been unable to attend. I got all the education he had wanted for me, and for himself. I got all the voice training he deserved and the acting lessons he would have loved. I get to do, every day, the things that were important to him—writing, making music, teaching people, thinking and talking about important philosophical questions. I am very much my father's daughter and always have been.

In recent years, I have learned other, harder truths about Papí: he had a drinking problem; he abandoned his first two children, Danilia and Dimitri; he offered me only very limited emotional support. I will likely never understand the impact of his leaving on Danilia and Dimitri. Danilia died at the age of fifty-two, apparently of a heart condition, though she had struggled for many years with drinking, drugs, and anorexia. Dimitri reached out to Cooper and to me in the weeks after her death. He was turning fifty himself. Papí died at forty-nine. Dimitri's maternal grandfather died around the same age, and my half-brother was clearly facing his mortality. We had several long conversations, which were warm and surprisingly comfortable. I learned more about our father's earlier life, when he was raising them, for about five years in the 1960s. Some stories were familiar, pleasant images of a father's legacy—Papí took Dimitri to baseball games and taught him to play; now Dimitri coaches his son's Little League team. Other stories were completely unfamiliar—*their* father was the pastor, taught them about God, read the Bible, preached and sang from the pulpit as they sat in the first pew. *Our* father appeared to be an atheist. I hope to build some sort of friendship with Dimitri. I would like to meet him again, and his wife and son, my nephew, Spenser, the only grandchild Papí has or may ever have. We seem to have a lot in common, Spenser and me, including musical talent, a love of nature, and a goofy sense of humor.

My relationship with Cooper is evolving as well. Only very recently have we begun to talk to each other about our feelings, specifically his. The pattern, before, was that I was the one who had all the feelings, and Cooper was amusing and cheering. I think I lost sight of Cooper when Papí died. He was so little. I looked after him, but I also think I looked *over* him. He seemed fine. He didn't cry a lot or say much about his feelings, like I did. So I assumed that somehow, the family tragedy had not reached him. Now Cooper is beginning to open up to me, to share his grief and anger and anxiety, his frustrations. The pattern of me struggling openly with depression and anxiety and Cooper struggling quietly with the same foes is starting to break. I hope he can find a therapist who is as good as Katie,

someone as good a fit for him. Their stories are theirs to tell, but I am beginning to see and hear Cooper's and Dimitri's pain, to make space to sit together and reflect together, and try to see what conclusions we can draw about ourselves and our family. To see if we can make sense of the scattered memories of our childhoods to create a narrative, something we can call our story.

My understanding of grief keeps shifting as well. The received wisdom is that there are four stages of grief—denial, bargaining, anger, and acceptance—and that the bereaved should make no major decisions for one year after a loss, which seems to imply that after 365.4 days have passed, you'll be fine. I have begun to think that grief may be a more cyclical process. It seems to me that perhaps we might cycle back through these stages over the years. Clearly, Parts can become stuck at different stages. I have certain Parts that, when we met them, were stuck in denial, not at all believing that Papi was dead, dreaming nearly every other night that he might come back, and how that might be. Some of those younger Parts who did not get to express or process their anger at his death have shown up in dreams, too, accessing a fury in dreaming they (and I) could never find in waking life. At least one Part that seemed stuck in bargaining; she seemed to feel that if only she was very, very, very good, Papi might come back. Maybe he had only left her like he did Danilia and Dimitri. Maybe *she* could be good enough to win him back, though. Maybe she could earn it.

I now think that grief also lasts a lot longer than we tend to anticipate, and has much greater impact on children than we'd like to think. "Children are resilient," we tell one another, hopefully, at funerals, but so much devastation is invisible. It all gets hidden so deep down; it might only come out in dreams, twenty years later.

There are many new ideas in my current worldview, including new ideas about new ideas. I used to think that it was really important to hold to conventions and tradition—even though my parents were not very traditional, and did not hand down ethnic or religious traditions to me. I wanted

to be a traditional young woman, so I found traditions to adopt, largely those of the patriarchal South. Now, I believe that fleeting impressions, ingrained subconscious patterns of thinking, and long-held beliefs are all to be honored but also questioned, held lightly enough to change. If we are open, we can receive new information and create new perspectives all the time. Perhaps most significantly, my religious period looks much different from where I stand now, and quite a bit darker. I think I understand better how and why the Christian faith became so important to me as to define my life for many years. That much I needed the church, a connection to a patriarch god as a substitute father, and church men and seminary professors as substitute uncles. “God is my refuge and strength,” the psalmist says, which was just what I needed between ages seventeen to thirty. I also had a genuine intellectual interest in God and theology. The Southern Baptists did me no favors by reinforcing my immature, black-and-white thinking, and keeping me from any real philosophy classes, until David Cook came along and pushed me into thinking for myself, and taught me to recognize and critique arguments and truth claims both oral and written.

Now, I think that people cling to, seek out, or create the religions they need to bolster their own worldview, and then they encase and encode that protective system with superstitious behaviors so as not to lose it. Some folks need a religious institution to tell them they are loved and special, some to remind them that they are really bad and need to behave. Some people need a religion that tells them justice will be done in the end, that ultimately everyone will get what they deserve. As a child, I thought people who were religious mostly wanted to be reminded to be good, to be honest, and generous, and that might be true as well. But I think a lot of religious folk cling to their antiquated ideas because they need Mommy and Daddy and Grandma to have been right. If you leave the church or mosque or synagogue, where your family brought you up, you’re saying (quite loudly) that they were wrong, and that’s hard to do.

As for my die-hard evangelical ex-friends, many of whom do not come from a church background, I think they really need God to be real and the Bible to be true so they can feel that someone is in charge, so there's a clear plan and clear rules to follow to get the life you want. They need to be good, but mostly they need to be right, so every other belief system has to be wrong. They need to believe (as many people do) that there is no randomness in the universe. The Puritans called this idea "meticulous Providence," and I used to find it comforting, too. Every hair on your head is numbered. God knows the fall of a sparrow. He's watching everything, and if not him, then your own personal "guardian angel." Or Santa Claus.

Even as a seminarian, I never fully believed the notion that people are sinful, nor believed in the idea of heaven and hell. Probably the key changes in my own beliefs are that now I am really sure there is not a divine being who made everything, who watches and controls everything, which makes prayer into wishing and worship simply a really odd superstition. I no longer think that any text is authoritative or holy, nor any institution. I no longer believe in God, or external authorities, or divine beings, definitely not in churches or "organized religion." The church is worse than irrelevant to me now—I believe it is dangerous to the intelligence and psyche of those who attend. My science education was weak enough and my church education strong enough that I am still coming to understand the theory of evolution and the multitude of reasons why creation is strictly a myth. I have come full circle, I think, or maybe on an upward spiral. I was raised an atheist, though ignorant of the reasoning behind atheism or religion. I became an unquestioning, "born-again" Christian, and am now an informed atheist, reading Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. I understand that human beings are not a special creation, that we did not need a creator in order to come into being.

In fact, I have recently rediscovered a love for science, buried since around age eleven, when I became convinced that I was not good enough at math to pursue my interests in biology. I wish my teachers had been more empowering, more encouraging of girls—even girls who displayed talents in

arts and humanities—who might pursue the sciences. The way I see it now, they, too, did me a disservice, by not challenging the prevailing wisdom that a.) girls aren't suited to math or science, and b.) people are entitled to one gift only, so a child already strong in one area doesn't need to explore other subjects. That said, I don't know how my path could have been better directed by the adults in my life. My emotional challenges have been intense, and distracting. Mainly, I wish I had learned to read and write music rather than solely the by-ear Suzuki method; I wish my parents had socialized me more, and that they had been able to send me to private schools. I wish I'd found yoga and meditation from an early age, to help me with managing internal and external distress. And I wish I'd been encouraged to push myself in math and science as a young person, and introduced to the research and writing in many more fields. I wish I'd gone to a smaller university, one for all women, and gotten more mentoring, more specific help in planning for grad school and career.

I go back and forth between thinking that my experience of dissociation is fairly normal, no big deal, and thinking it is really bizarre. That oscillation may continue for a while. Maybe over time, I will make up my mind. Or maybe I will always see it as both. Maybe it is both. Dick Schwartz, the founder of Internal Family Systems therapy, believes that everyone has Parts (though he chooses not to capitalize the word). I think he would say that Parts exist on a spectrum from mixed feelings to split personalities, and my experience is somewhere in the middle. I am learning that when I am struggling, it's because a Part has come forward and subtly taken over. When I feel at a loss, a younger Part who can't cope well with adult responsibilities is at the fore. My six-year-old-self refused to drink at school. I often forget to drink all day. My ten-year-old self skipped meals to cope with stress. She is ill-equipped to feed me as an adult. I talked in a babyish, high-pitched voice until I worked with a voice coach a few years ago, to ground my voice more deeply inside my body.

Some of my younger Parts are still disconnected from the body. They make me feel dizzy or floaty; they're uncomfortable with sex. Some show up quite powerfully *in* the body, as sharp headaches

that don't respond to pain relievers, as stomach aches, muscle cramps in my neck and shoulders and low back, as laryngitis or extreme fatigue. For years, decades, my Parts kept me outside my body. Only in my thirties, only through yoga, did I begin to feel that my feet were on the floor, that I had weight, held steady by gravity. When you are floating just outside your body, like an aura, like a shadow, a ghost, you have no need of food or drink. A shadow cannot become dehydrated. Nor can she feel or notice when the body she almost inhabits becomes malnourished or dehydrated.

The life of the mind is a natural fit for a disembodied spirit. Religious retreat may be just what she seems to need. But it can only delay her reconnection to the body, her resurrection. A nine-year stint studying theology and philosophy can be a neat deflection. Procrastination of adulthood by remaining in school is nothing new. But an adult woman needs a body. *

In high school and college, I dreaded Monday mornings, when friends and colleagues inevitably ask, "What did you do this weekend?" I dreaded it because I could never answer. Every week, I drew a blank. All I could say was, "I don't remember," or "I don't know," which earned me odd looks, and sometimes further questioning or implications that I must be using some illicit substances. If I took a minute, and concentrated, sometimes I could find my way back to something general and passive—shopping or reading had taken place—but it was never clear. There was no sense that I, who was speaking, had been active at all during the past few days. Eventually, I learned to say, "Not much, how about you?" to cover up my confusion. I understand now that I was encountering a disjunction between different Parts. The Monday morning student had no memory of the weekend. She didn't get weekends, really; she might not even remember doing homework. She only existed at school.

Flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized, and stable (FACES)—these are the qualities of the healthy mind, according to Dr. Dan Siegel, the qualities of "a complex system in its integrated state." These are qualities that are lacking when someone dissociates, and which were definitely lacking when

I would experience this Monday-morning fugue state. My brain was in those moments *inflexible*—stuck in the past; it was *maladaptive*—not adapting to different environments, but rather compartmentalizing them. It was *incoherent*—not maintaining its integrity under changing circumstances over time. My mind and body, until very recently, were also *not steadily energized*—they cycled frequently between hyper and hypo-arousal. The fight-or-flight response is hyper-arousal, where adrenaline floods the nervous system: the heart races, the legs might shake, palms sweat, head pounds. In hypo-arousal, the adrenaline needed for fighting or fleeing is shut off; the body is immobilized or numbed as emotional and cognitive functions are disrupted. My mind was *not stable*, though it may have looked fairly stable from the outside. It was not maintaining its equilibrium without dysfunction.

I have a lot of new sympathy for my childhood self, my little Parts who were so hurt or scared and isolated, who were stuck working so hard to keep everything together and keep all the grown-ups happy. I must have needed a lot of help from my Parts to get through my days at school, as sensitive and introverted as I was (and am), as stressful it was to have long days around noisy children, the travel back and forth in D.C. traffic. At home, I could let down my defenses against noise and chaos, slip into obedient-daughter mode, directed by the Parts who memorized all the Mommy-words and shelved away the feelings and opinions she disallowed.

Only recently have I begun to understand more deeply why I struggled so with eating, not only in school but at home, and throughout my life—how that struggle was and is related to my history of trauma. Some researchers believe that picky eating or indigestion in childhood and restriction in later life can be indicators of undiagnosed food allergies and intolerances. Sure enough, I discovered in 2013 that I cannot digest wheat, dairy, soy, corn, beans, or chocolate. No wonder I've been sick to my stomach my whole life.

Perhaps even more important, all these sensitivities and digestive problems can be trauma responses as well. *The story of the wreck*—the story I’ve been told or telling all along about why my stomach is weak—started with my mother saying, “You were always a colicky baby,” and my own explanation, “I’ve always had a nervous stomach.” After the sexual assault in my senior year of college, the story became, “I had *e.coli*. and after that, I had a hard time digesting food.” This is now my mother’s favored version of the story. After seminary, I began saying, “I had an eating disorder in grad school, and after that, I had a hard time digesting food. Everything I ate made me sick.” Ever since I learned some yoga and some Ayurveda, I have tended to say, “I have a really *vata* system,” which means that my body is dominated by the element of air, typified by anxiety and weak digestion.

All this is true. But. The thing itself, the thing I came for, is that my whole body and my whole mind have been affected by trauma. A cycle of hyper- and hypo-arousal was stuck on repeat, and my frequently-disrupted digestion is a failure of homeostasis. According to Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, a psychiatrist, neuroscientist, and the world’s leading expert in trauma, irritable bowel syndrome and other digestive problems—along with migraines, chronic neck and back pain, and fatigue—are ubiquitous among traumatized children and adults. But the more I listen to my body, avoid hard-to-digest foods, practice my yoga and meditation, and work with Katie, the longer I can go without an IBS flare-up. I even managed a trip “home” to visit my mother over Thanksgiving recently, and my digestive system remained calm and steady the entire time. This is how we measure progress.

When I was around twenty-eight, after working with Ellen, and going to Oxford, I was able to start eating again, and not want to starve, not want to diet or shrink. Parts-work with Katie and reading the experts in trauma psychology and psychiatry, now, I continue to revise my understanding of my disordered eating, too. Clearly, there were always some challenges connected to how my digestive organs operated; clearly there was a physiological response to emotional distress and panic, which would shut down my gut processes. Beyond these, though, I also had a diagnosable pattern of

disordered eating, an actual eating disorder, that I now believe was directed and maintained by Parts. As the accounts of my sessions with Katie show quite vividly, Parts often work together in small groups, with protective Manager and Firefighter Parts shielding hurting Exiles. Addictions and other obsessive-compulsive behaviors, including eating disorders, in my view, involve a very strong Firefighter working overtime to numb a distressed Part or group of Parts, distracting from the Pain with a substitute sensation. There can also be a Manager using self-destructive behaviors and harsh language picked up from early influences to punish another Part or group of Parts.

In her book, *The Secret Language of Eating Disorders*, Peggy Claude-Pierre posits the theory that anorexics do not have low self-esteem—they actually *lack* a coherent self. This idea seemed radical to me when I read it, back in 1998, when the book first came out, and at the same time, it resonated as deeply true. And now, I understand how and why it was true for me. My disordered eating was related to my dissociative coping patterns. My Self was so fragmented, and had been fragmented as it was in formation. Many of my Parts were children and adolescents, so the Self I did have felt scattered and insecure, emotionally unstable.

One of the secrets exposed by Pierre's work was that many anorectic patients hear voices, ugly voices, in their heads, telling us not to eat, that we are fat and don't deserve food. In many cases, the voices are harsher than this, laced with curse words and abusive accusations. As one might imagine, it feels something like a demonic presence, and patients are loath to admit this aspect of their condition to friends, family, or even counselors. We are conditioned by the societal stigma of mental illness to hide these dissociative experiences because they seem so dramatically irrational, and the Parts that are running this gruesome show will work overtime to convince us not to ask for help. I wonder how much more quickly I might have recovered from anorexia if I had had Katie, or another counselor trained in Parts-work, to help me. As it was, I did it on my own, over hundreds of grueling days and nights, arguing with the voices in my head, feeling isolated and embattled. I have maintained a healthy

weight for more than twelve years now, and, for the most part, healthy beliefs and attitudes. The Parts that are uncomfortable with food or with having a body are quieted, and when they come forward, I know how to help them.

I find it fascinating and, finally, empowering to be in my body, now. Thanks to yoga, I am physically strong, balanced, and flexible—in my forties, I am able to do more, physically, than ever before. I am living my yoga, spending time almost every day in handstand, headstand, twists, backbends, forward bends and restorative poses, as well as meditation. I am living my sexuality with greater fullness. Most of the negative sensations that I experience in my body, I believe, come from my Parts, and as I am able to help them, I find more neutral time. These negative sensations tend to be headaches, muscle cramps in my neck, shoulders, and back. I also get odd, less-negative sensations, itches and twitches, stomach churning, sometimes shakiness in my hands.

One idea of healing from complex PTSD involves integration of Parts. I don't know what it might feel like to have my Parts fully integrated into my personality, not to dissociate at all, anymore. There is definitely resistance to the idea, when I feel around inside, some discomfort about dissolving the boundaries that keep us separate. Maybe all the Tribe can be absorbed into the One, the Brahma of Me—maybe it could be beautiful, like nirvana. This is what I read about in essays and blogs by others who have struggled with dissociation. Do I need to integrate, though? Or do my Parts serve me well, as they are? The Parts I know so far are brilliant and creative and powerful. They help me, I think, more than they hurt me. As of right now, my goal is simply that all the Tribe know that I am, we are, forty-two years old and married, that they all have access to me and to the Resources, that no Part feels stuck at any stage of grief or doing any task that she doesn't want to do.

I have other goals, other elements of my vision of wellness. I used to be terrified of being in cars, but after about six months of working with Katie, I began to feel safer on the road, both driving

and even as a passenger. I can fly and handle road trips without Valium, or alcohol. After a year and a half of working with Katie, I finally started to feel safe in my own home. I can fall asleep in the evenings without a Part of me wanting to hide under the bed or in a closet in the back room. I do still sleep as far as possible from the bedroom door, at home or in a hotel. But I sleep better, far better, now, as the writing of this book comes to an end. I have fewer nightmares and episodes of night sweats, fewer dreams that are seriously so confusing that when I wake, I'm not sure what the truth is. With support from Katie and my primary care doctor, I am weaning myself off the Wellbutrin XL and Celexa that have kept me stable over the past five and ten years, respectively. I am finding a lot of new energy underneath the sort of muting sensation of the antidepressants. I hope to turn that newfound vitality into entrepreneurial drive: to increase my writing output, send more of my work out for publication, and find new outlets for my yoga teaching. I feel really good—balanced, hopeful, no longer fearful and drained all the time—and really well-supported by that team of friends, colleagues, students, and holistic health-care professionals I call Team OMC. Between the Team and the Tribe, I am never alone.

Katie Session

Friday, November 7, 2014

11:20-12:15 pm.

Katie's been at a Kentucky psychology conference; she's looking forward to reading my manuscript over the weekend. I tell her about Maya, and her dream, about Saraswati and my work this week with a Part who was resistant to my writing. We discuss the possibility of ancestor work. I tell Katie I've run up against a lot of resistance this week or so, mostly in my throat and serious heartburn.

I've tried to work with them on my own, but it's been a challenge.

We use the tappers to connect with that resistant Part in my throat and upper chest, and also find a sad, teary feeling in the lower side of my cheeks. I find that Maya shows up again, and tries to put me to sleep; my head wants to nod down and over to the left. I look up in the opposite direction, to the right and out the window at the late morning sun, on yellow leaves.

Katie encourages me not to meet this resistance with resistance. I can let my head fall down, my gaze dropping to the darkest spot in her leaf-design carpet. It's a swirl of deep brown leaves and stems that converge just in front of her right foot. And it turns out that I don't fall asleep. I just fall deeper into the sadness in my throat and cheeks. Fairly quickly, I find that I can connect to this hurting Part and what she is feeling. This sadness, this grief, maybe—I don't learn what it's about—seems endless. The Part gives me the image of a dark well, so deep you can't see the bottom. Indeed, it might be

bottomless. If I go down in there, I might never come back, or I might lose myself in the dark. The Part is clearly scared of being overwhelmed by her emotions.

Katie checks in with me, asks what I'm getting from this Part. I tell her this Part, whom I've decided to call Astrid, has learned that feelings are supposed to be short; they're not supposed to last longer than a few minutes. She has always been told, "Take a deep breath and calm down." "I'm going to count to ten." "That's enough crying. Put a smile on your face." "Go to your room and come out when you can be pleasant." This sad feeling doesn't go away that fast. Astrid knows it's more than five minutes, more than twenty minutes of sad. So she doesn't know what to do. The feelings seem bigger than her. She can't manage them. They might pull her down, into the depths.

Katie understands. Astrid feels really alone in her grief, like she doesn't have any tools or resources. We ask the Resources to come sit with Astrid by the well. Other Parts want to come around, too, ten or twelve of them. Astrid starts to feel more relaxed inside her sadness. I tell Katie, I just want to send Astrid love. Katie suggests that we see if Astrid can feel the love and the sadness at the same time.

"Because they're both real?" Astrid asks.

"That's right," Katie says.

"And they're both real at the same time," Astrid realizes.

"Yes," says Katie.

With Katie's help and mine, Astrid starts to feel the deep sadness in her dark well alongside the strong love of the Tribe, right in the center of her chest. On every inhale she brings in a little more support, and on every exhale she releases a bit more of her sadness. She finds she can go deeper and deeper

into the well, without feeling alone or overwhelmed. Katie asks her to see if there might actually be some place at the bottom of the well, where Astrid could maybe rest for a while.

“Like a rock in a river?” I ask, trying to imagine what might be there.

“Let’s just see what she finds,” Katie says.

I sit with Astrid and the Tribe, and breathe in love, and breathe out grief. Slowly, we start to feel the pain begin to lift.

“I think we’re coming back up now,” Astrid says, surprised. “I think the well is not bottomless after all. It feels like I’m in a dumbwaiter.” I picture it made of black wood, with a window in the front, and a handle on the inside, so we can get out whenever we’re ready. The dumbwaiter moves steadily upward, to the top.

“The energy is different now,” I say, “the whole room seems brighter.”

“I can feel that, too,” Katie says.

“I can breathe better. The air is clear and dry, like in the desert. Have you ever been to the desert?”

“Yes,” Katie says.

“It’s like that. How the sky is bigger and higher. The air feels brighter because there’s no humidity.”

“Yes, it does.”

My whole body feels expansive and light. I know my eyes are brighter, and I’m smiling again.

“Even in the carpet,” I tell Katie, “when I look in the same place, it’s not a dark well; it’s not black and deep anymore. It’s just brown leaves. Actually, I see the light blue colors around it more.”

Katie asks me to check back in with the sadness. “Can you still feel it?”

I can. “But it feels smaller—much smaller. It feels portable.” I hold up a hand to show her. “Like the size of a matchbox. I can take it with me wherever I go, if I want to.”

“And do you still feel connected to the Tribe?”

Oh, yes. I can take their love and support with me, too, wherever I go.

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I can no other answer make but thanks,

And thanks, and evermore thanks.

Wm. Shakespeare

TWELFTH NIGHT

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