*SURRENDER**

I am standing in a lake at the bottom of a large hill. I'm surrounded by the biggest trees I have ever seen. The type whose leaves stay on all year long. Maybe it is that lake from our last family trip to Colorado. At the top of the hill there is a cabin. I know she is there even though she has not shown herself to me yet. The water is cold and blue like in those advertisements for fancy bottled water. It feels like it is going to rain. I look down and see that the water I am standing in is turning into snakes. They are slithering beneath my feet, wrapping themselves around my ankles. They are all different sizes. Slippery. I feel the fear rising in my chest as they climb up to my knees. They use each other to work their way up. Their bodies tangle as they morph into a rubberband ball of snakes all the way up to that birthmark underneath my left boob. They are like quicksand. I try to remember that Instagram reel that told me how to get out of quicksand but decide it is useless since these are snakes, not quicksand. Then, he appears. He is himself, but somehow older. Like how everytime I see him he somehow looks so much older. I am myself. I am in my adult body. He picks me up and carries me away from the snakes like he used to carry me up to bed when I fell asleep in the back of the car. He is carrying me up the hill to that cabin and she is there. She's making spaghetti. She never used to make spaghetti. She is the same age as she was. For a split second, I am happy. The purest form of happiness I have ever felt. I am in her arms again. I smell her perfume on her skin instead of my own. I am drenched in the light of her smile.

He called me three days later. *It's all gone.* It felt too similar to that phone call from him two years earlier when all he had to say was *she's gone.* Except somehow worse because she is still gone and now all that was left of her is gone. He didn't say it, but I knew in that moment that he was gone too. *It's all gone.* I'm getting ahead of myself. Being vague on purpose because the

**addictus: to give over, to surrender*

details of this phone call are the type of betrayal that I still can't speak of without wanting to vomit. As I type right now I feel so much shame over it. Shame about how it all went down. Shame that I allowed it to happen. Shame that I couldn't save him. Shame that I couldn't save her. Shame that I sometimes wake up in the middle of the night thinking about the dog finding his dead body. Shame that she was alone in the end. Shame that when someone asks me how he is doing I have to say I don't know. It's piling up and up and up beyond that birthmark underneath my left boob and no one is coming to save me.

She had seven miscarriages before I was born. I feel a bit haunted by those seven whispers of life; the cycle of hope and despair that accompanied each. The blood and tissue and dreams lost in pursuit of a child. All seven of them were born with me in a way. It may sound strange, but as a child I felt guilty for having survived knowing that if any of the others had I would not be here. Alas, I made it through and they named me Marlee. It is a combination of their names, Mark and Kellee.

I am at a point of reckoning. I am reckoning with my parents' actions, their accidents which have become my destiny. *Our children will be born of our actions. Our accidents will become their destinies. Oh, the actions will remain. It is a simple matter of what you will do when the chips are down, my friend.*[1] All I am left with now is trying to pick up the fallen chips. I am the child of two addicts. I was the child of two addicts, now I am 25. No longer a child, too old to be an orphan. I am the adult child of one addict and my mother is dead. My mother, Kellee, died of a fentanyl overdose when I was 20. My father, Mark, gambled away all the money my brother and I were meant to inherit from my mother's death. $750,000. So, yeah. Orphan will do for now. This is the dance of addiction. It destroys everything in its path. It has destroyed me over and over and over. I am attempting to choreograph its aftermath.

[1]Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* p. 87

WANTING DISEASE – DEFINING ADDICTION

I do not consider myself an addict. I didn't start drinking coffee until I was in my twenties out of fear of developing a dependence to it. My dad took me to the casino on my mom's first birthday posthumously and I won $5,000 on the Buffalo Slot Machine then swore to never set foot on that second-hand smoke seeped carpet ever again. Sitting to the left of my keyboard is the pamphlet from the Al-Anon meeting I just attended. *God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.* I'm not so sure about this God thing, but I know that I have found myself walking into a church basement every so often in an attempt to evade my genetic pre-disposition.

This is not to say I don't have my vices and varying dependencies to them. There's my perfect night out concoction of three or four glasses of wine, two cigarettes, half a joint, and a cheese quesadilla from Taco Bell. The clothes pouring out of my closet which I justify as not a complete embodiment of overconsumption because they are all from Goodwill. My restrict-binge diet I have been mastering since I was in middle school. Instagram, obviously. And of course, the string of monogamous entanglements I have inhabited since I was nineteen. Melissa Febos' *The Dry Season: A Memoir of Pleasure in a Year Without Sex* writes: "love was not a drink and my pursuit of it did not fit perfectly into the rubric of addiction, but it had taken me."[2] So, yeah.

When I set out on this research I declared that I would give up all vices and attend Al-Anon every week. Hell, maybe I'll go *twice a week*. GO FULL METHOD. MAKE MY ART MY ONLY VICE. Since then, I have smoked many drunk cigarettes, gotten back together with my ex-girlfriend, started tracking my calories and steps religiously, bought two new vibrators, smoked more weed than the rest of my life combined, spent many many hours on Instagram reels, and attended exactly one (1) Al-Anon meeting. HERE IS MY HEART OF MY SLEEVE,

[2]Febos 24

DEAR READER! I say all this not to worry you or make you feel some sort of sympathy. As Maggie Nelson puts it, "The difference between forms of abandonment that vitalise and those that thwart – not to mention the desire to choose the former over the later – is something one must come to know for oneself."[3] For now, I am in the former and as someone who has been staging interventions since age 14, I am well aware that this is exactly what an addict would say… Touché. I mention all of this to admit that I too succumb to vice nearly everyday and I imagine you might too. Not in an accusatory way, but in the statistical sense. In 2024, one in six Americans met the criteria for substance use disorder.[4] This does not account for behavior based addictions or undocumented instances of substance abuse. I personally do not need data to know that my generation is plagued by addiction.

So, when I am talking about *addiction* I am considering it in regards to substances and behaviors, excess and restriction. This definition encompasses the most casual (i.e. my two new vibrators) to utterly destructive (i.e. my mothers thirteen year struggle with opioid addiction that ultimately led to her death at age 52). Not to mention the slippage between those two extremes that is, in many instances, more of a crash than a slip. This interest in addiction considers the societal conditions that have caused so many people to become dependent on vices be that sex, Instagram, heroin, online shopping, alcohol, gambling, nicotine, exercise, cannabis, food, porn, work, *etcetera*. Maggie Nelson's *On Freedom* offers that perhaps "people take drugs because they feel unfree, and drugs make them feel freer. Or, people take drugs because they want to escape their heavy and painful conditions, but find themselves reburdened and enslaved by addiction. Or, people take drugs because freedom is hard to bear, and addiction offers a counterweight to that unbearable lightness of being."[5]

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[3]Maggie Nelson, *On Freedom* p. 170
[4]https://www.samhsa.gov/data/data-we-collect/nsduh-national-survey-drug-use-and-health/national-releases
[5]Maggie Nelson, *On Freedom* p. 127

I am attempting to understand addiction with as little judgment as possible. Yet, as someone who has had their life ruined by addicts, I will not ignore that destruction. I believe there is nuance in the fact that: yes, this is a disease AND many addicts are terrible people who ruin the lives of others for their own selfish pursuits. An addict is both a victim and perpetrator. We can have sympathy for the conditions which led to their dependencies, but that does not mean we need not hold them accountable for their actions. There is a reason *making amends* is a part of every twelve step program ever. This writing is not anti-drug, vise, or pleasure; rather it encourages thoughtful consideration of our relationship to them, their effect on society at large, how easily they can overtake us and who this all benefits.

To fill the gaps of knowledge on vices I am not personally acquainted with, I rely on memoirs and fiction. Barabara Kingsolver's, *Demon Copperhead*, is one of these companions. It tells the story of a young boy, Demon, growing up in Appalachia (SPOILER ALERT) whose mother dies of a drug overdose leaving him orphaned at 12. He eventually spirals into his own addictions and in the thick of it he ponders: *But where did it come from this wanting disease? It's these things already inside you that are going to take you down. The restlessness in your gut, like tomatoes gone stupid with their blood feuds, prowling around in the moon-dead dark. The hopeless wishes that won't quit stalking you: some perfect words you think you could say to somebody to make them see you, love you, and stay.*[6] This might be the most apt definition of addiction I have ever read.

THE PARMACORPORNAGRAPHIC ERA – AN ABUNDANCE OF ADDICTIONS

Plan to use: Testo Junkie Paul B. Preciado (where Pharmacopornographic is defined), *The Age of Addiction: How Bad Habits Became Big Business* David T. Courtwright, some more

[6]Barabara Kingsolver, *Demon Copperhead* pg 281

fiction, some more statistics. ORRRRRR might just incorporate this into the last section and let it be a line of inquiry that runs through the whole paper.

DOUBLE, TRIPLE, INFINITE LIVES

Tere O'Connor often talks about the closeted mind as a site for choreographic inquiry. WANT TO ADD A QUOTE HERE FROM *EPISTIMOLOGY OF THE CLOSET* OR *QUEER PHENOMENOLOGY. AND MORE DEFINING OF THE CLOSET IN THE REALM OF QUEER THEORY.*

I feel as if my family was in a sort of closet of our own. My parents more specifically, but the closet was in the shape of our family home. A double life. In one, we fit into all of the normative expectations of a white middle-class suburban family, in the other our existence was queer in the sense of, "a deconstruction of normative knowledge projects and epistemologies."[7] For much of this time I was also literally in the closet. The everyday performance of *Naturally (Fake) Blonde Student Council President With Perfect Attendance* while living in a dysfunctional and addiction ridden home, made the performance of *Straight* easy.

Beth Macy's *Dopesick* accounts countless stories of people cruising the pipeline from prescribed painkillers to full on opioid addictions. It goes something like this: average person gets in a car accident, they experience back pain for months following, their doctor prescribes them *oxycontin*, their pain subsides, they get off the pills and the pain returns, they get more pills, that doctor eventually refuses to prescribe them said pills, they find a new doctor, they run out of new doctors, they steal from their elderly parents, they turn to cheaper street alternatives such as heroin, the heroin is laced with fentanyl, they die. This one of many stories happens to be

[7]Margot Weiss, "Queer Theory from Elsewhere and the Im/Proper Objects of Queer Anthropology"

my mother's… minus a few stints at rehab, two near fatal overdoses, and at least one arrest. Her opioid addiction spanned thirteen years; it started when I was seven and my brother was three.

For the bulk of those years, she was able to live life as a pretty normal working suburban mom. She sent her kids to private school, had a fancy marketing job, was married to her high school sweetheart, and lived in a nice house (well there was that one foreclosure, but that was my dad's fault). She was well dressed and could talk to a stranger about anything. She was beloved and funny and lit up a room (cliche, but true). Then there was her other life. The one where she would bring her twelve year old daughter on drug runs. The cheating and stealing and lying. Health scares and doctors visits and trips to Walgreens to yell at the pharmacist. Threats of divorce which led to an eventual life in the city with Jimmy who owned the wine bar. That weird call on my birthday to ask if I had taken my driver's test after not seeing me for months. Jobs lost, food stamp applications on her apartment counter, the robbery which was actually her selling her TV and wedding ring to buy drugs. Arrests for driving her car the wrong way on the highway in the middle of the night. Two deaths, two resurrections. That time I went to visit her and she forgot who I was. The fentanyl in the spice cabinet. Telling me *it's just crack, Marlee*.

These two lives crashed together on Monday, February 7, 2022.