

content warnings for: dictatorship mention, vomiting mention, explicit mention of sexual content, some elitism peppered all throughout, screams in The Call section

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Picture this: big city royalty with [a penthouse](#) in Wacker Drive, a [house](#) (or a *manor*, really) in Dearborn, and [a ranch](#) in some Chicago suburb nowhere-town named Wheeler. Any other life and you'd have been shuttled between the first two after that *super* messy divorce your parents had, but your grandfather stepped in, took you under his wing, and he raised you as if you were his own child and he wasn't pushing past sixty by then.

After that divorce, neither of your parents really felt like caring for a child, so they acquiesce easily. You visit them over the summer, sometimes, but Wheeler was all you've ever known: the stables and the horses and the farms that you ran around in. You could have held court from a penthouse in some Chicago hotel; but instead you're just small-town royalty, crowned Homecoming Queen three years in a row and your kingdom is composed of subjects made up of corn ears and empty fields and a pet sheep your grandfather gave you.

(Your grandfather tells you that he named the sheep Mopsy.)

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Listen to [this](#). *This* is a twenty-two minute long speech that hits you in the gut just when you least expect it. You're a sophomore in college and you feel like this is *it*.

This is water, David Foster Wallace says and you learn it, live it, love it. *This is water*, you tell yourself, trying to be mindful, even if you find yourself slipping back to your old habits because it's only human to fail. *This is water*, you tell yourself still, because what else can you believe in?

Life is too short for whatever the hell it is your parents wanted you to do; life is too long to be stuck at some boring menial job trying to make rich people richer with yourself in conjunction. Wall Street fucking sucks and you know it.

You declare your major in sociology and for a hot second there, you almost get disowned.

(You're relieved you weren't, of course. Where would you be without your Gucci?)

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**From latte socialist to gauche caviar –
how to spot good-time leftwingers
around the world**

That is an article title from *The Guardian*, noted left-wing newspaper from that remnant of the empire where the sun never sets. As a member of the intelligentsia, you claim to read it, along with *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times* because being left wing *and* educated is *so* chic nowadays.

The article makes you smile, and you send them an email with a suggested correction. *The article is too long*, you find yourself typing. *This is how it should have went*:

From latte socialist to gauche caviar — how to spot good-time leftwingers around the world

1. Hang around Leonora Zobel de Ayala long enough and you'll see them soon congregate.

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Your grandfather is a good man, an honest man, a man who lived all his life in one country before [Proclamation No. 1081](#) gets passed and his home country gets taken over by a dictator. The rest of his family stays, but he's not going to collaborate with a *tyrant*, and so he moves his family to the United States, land of opportunity and former coloniser of *his* home country.

(Never mind the fact that *your* family was from the original colonisers.)

He was already rich when he came, and he only got richer when he started working, and your father and your aunts and your uncles all made the family even richer by gentrifying neighbourhoods for more space for the rich and famous. What your family does, essentially, is destroying family homes to make way for million-dollar flats which will only ever be used as a *pied à terre*, little residences that are empty for about forty-eight of the fifty-two calendar weeks.

You think, *how good it is to be rich*—except you only think this when you're eighteen and you're out of that small town and you finally come into a full realisation of what *money* means.

And what it means is this: reserving \$200 tables in nightclubs only to never turn up because you and your friends drank way too much in the pregame session and now you're all huddled over and vomiting in white toilets on marbled flooring; [Halsey songs](#) becoming the anthem to your life; and *boredom*.

(Oh, God, the *boredom*. Were you ever bored like this in Wheeler? Small town suburbia never seemed so *exciting* until you found yourself in this concrete jungle.)

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Let's not get this wrong, though: as much as you keep denigrating Wheeler for being a small town? It's *your* small town. You love the place, you *really* do. You can't

think of growing up anywhere else, because it's paradise. *A little slice of Heaven on Earth*, you can't help but think, even with (or maybe *because of*?) all that religious fervour and everything.

But you acknowledge this: Wheeler was only ever a place for growing up. It will not accept you now, heretic that you are. Your identities feel like a checklist of what their bogeyman would be:

- nonbinary
- lesbian
- pseudo-Marxist
- quasi-revolutionary
- ironic
- memelord.

(Say that quickly ten times, and you'll appear in the mirror.)

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You come back for your dissertation though, which is titled:

*Oh my God, look at her butt:
Sexual Practices and Religious Belief in Middle America.*

Judging by the looks on your interviewees' faces, they didn't quite expect li'l Princess Nora to be asking them which position they like to get fucked in.

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When you finish your dissertation, you're finally inducted into the rat race that is looking for a job in the oversaturated field of academia, looking for yet more recommendation letters from exasperated and underpaid advisers for a shot at employment in community colleges that mean *fucking* nothing at all.

(You went to the *University of Chicago*, for God's sake, so why are you hunting small fry?)

You try for a post-doc fellowship in all the Ivy Leagues, the Russell Group, all the big name universities in the English-speaking world and then some. You even think about coming to the country of your *heritage*, that pearl of the Orient, because surely anything would be better than teaching kids who don't even know how to *cite* properly and—

—and you get some and you lose some but nothing ever really *sticks* because you feel lost in this concrete jungle and you honestly can't be missing Wheeler, can you?

—and you write and you write and you write. *Publish or perish*, your adviser told you once.

—and suddenly you get The Call.

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The Call goes like [this](#).

Or it feels like that anyway, because it feels like a *rug* has been pulled under you and you've fallen facedown on the floor with no way to know how to ever get up.

You go back to Wheeler, because it's the decent thing to do, the *Christian* thing to do. Your grandfather has taken you in when you were most vulnerable, and what goes around comes around. *An eye for an eye*, except infinitely nicer.

(You try not to judge your six other cousins for not even *visiting*, because you know God above will do all the judging for you.)

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[This](#) is what you come back to.

You can't recognise this town, this place, this *hell* that has replaced the idyllic vision you had of Wheeler. Nobody knows anything and a little girl is missing and there are *horrors* which you've thought only existed in movies.

The summer has ended, and you have not been saved.

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(You get a sheep to keep you company. You name her Mopsy 2.)