

# *Instagram is Nonfiction*

From its first username jeunenuits, (rusty French translation of young nights) to its most recent of my pen name, Instagram is an ongoing autobiography of my realities since 2012.

Instagram is nonfiction. Electronic, perhaps.

Think subconscious bookscraping. Thumbing backward jumpstarts time machines to pre-epiphany moments, rearranging wool exactly how it covered your eyes during photos. Reminisce on moments you've enjoyed. Even moments you pretended existed. Maybe moments that never did.

What sights I've captured. What narratives I've created. What monsters I've fed.

@macambcheese | October 8, 2016: "Bulldog Bash 🤔" | 50 likes



"Are y'all related?" people would ask us, citing our lack of Southern drawl, perky "white girl" voices, dark skin, kinky black afros and almond-sized eye shapes. Getting tired of the chocolate sister cliché, we agreed, expanding into the beauty of Black womanhood.

We were more than skin deep. Sharing sweaters that fit our eccentric tastes. Choosing which jeans to help make our asses look better after plumping it with fast student union food. Her letting me howl and cry, when I realized it was truly over with my first college fling; me resting in her other empty bed after weeping. Bursting in tears together, laughing at a friend's family patriarch decorating their Tupelo living room with a cotton plant. Me confessing that I hated how close she got to our good guy friend knowing he'd vanish in her charm. Sewing my bookbag together as the right shoulder strap played Simon-says with me, holding on by a few threads by May.

By sophomore year, we were ourselves; glittering with alcoholic sweat, flattened by the failure of a no-show Flo Rida as the concert header. While another fickle college memory fizzled out, our friendship picture-taking traditions still stuck.

In this one, Shannen became an American depiction, sloping into a homey human hammock of Black women's bodies. I lifted my legs in the air, my sister collapsed like the wasted college students Bulldog Bash pressured us to be, and we toppled over each other, close in distance and in heart. Aligned again, we deserved

another's warmth after our summer trauma twinges. It twisted some things and made me vigilant over both of us.

Sadly, our sisterhood soured out over her using my loyalty to cover her adultery, telling me she was being harassed by the same guy who she scheduled secret rendezvous with.

In a smoke session with a mutual friend, burning truths set branches of our family tree ablaze.

"You know, relationships like that are always complicated when they lie to you," Smoke Buddy said.

"She was my sister, couldn't be that-"

"Sister?!" They interrupted. "She told everyone that y'all were, you know, together..."

Smoke Buddy shared false fables of me fingering her to sleep, flipping goodbye hugs into kisses and fighting off feisty upperclassmen to keep her faithful to us. Her closeted attraction made those accusations believable and internally devastating, so our grassy lounging was likely our last time ever that close. Yet, she stuck with me.

I couldn't let girlfriends braid my hair or see me moisturizing after showers. Distant friendships were a translation of true heartbreak.

@artfulamb | November 29, 2018: "She could so she did | Last show of the semester" | 247 likes



"It took a little bit of confidence and pressure. I didn't want to step out my comfort zone but I'm super happy to say I'm MSU's Take 30 News Anchor for my TV Practicum class ❤️" I announced two months earlier, which garnered 298 likes on September 14.

Once likes stopped coming in and excitement dissipated, I was fed up with TV.

Out of the other seven classmates who went for anchor, my voice was the easiest choice for firm TV-talking tones to glide like *thissssss* and end sentences on the dime like - this! That engaging, concerned newscaster voice didn't have to fight through my proper Maryland accent. After all, I was a sports halftime reporter since I was fifteen and when I came home for summer break. And, for that reason, the hustle and bustle of TV reporting didn't eat at me.

But juggling interviews, writing scripts, editing interviews, scripts and TV packages all in a four-day span, plus my other four classes? Let's not even touch on being penniless, penis-less and wearing business professional clothes throughout stuffy Southern autumn days for the 4 p.m. show.

Depression hiked up my hormones for cystic acne. Raw pimples and healing scabs scattered across my round, brown face. Blemishes outshined my white teeth and perfectly plucked eyebrows exposed by studio lighting and professional

cameras. I hated it. I hated it. I hated it. Yet, at times, I loved hearing my voice click and twirl to perfection in shows. I didn't mind faking it at times so I would promo shows with photos at the desk. I sat relaxed, smiling, shuffling script papers and engaged off-guards on sentences I routinely stumbled over.

It caught up though. In mid-October between one Tuesday class to present our VOSOTs and packages for Thursday's show - I had an intense mental breakdown. I alerted our professor, Kevin, that I wouldn't be attending classes for an "emergency." He gave me permission to turn my last package in later, so I submitted at 5:15 p.m., but a zero was entered at 6:37 p.m.

"Hey Kevin," I approached our professor on show day. "I see you haven't changed grades on my draft package."

"Yeeahhh, sorry won't be changing!" Kevin, TV-ready 24-7, sounded like sick joy. "It was after class time, so I just have to assu-"

I walked away before spazzing. Hyperventilating and scream-crying at a lake off campus shouldn't earn me an academic zero, so I went to prep for our second to last show.

My co-anchor was Guy Gram, one of the students who played our school mascot. Guy struck kiddy hearts with high-fives and photos but swept college girls with his 6'2" height, effortless blonde hair, caramel brown eyes and sarcastic, "cultured" sense of humor which included random outbursts of "Yah, yeet!" and "On God!"

Guy and I would play around during commercial breaks keeping our ridiculous, adult TV voices vibrant and loose.

"I'm Guy Collins and I'm a boss ass bitch!" He'd joke and say to me and two other girls - our floor director, a spunky, fashion magazine editor from Georgia, and camera operator, a blond-haired, blue-eyed Southern Belle who overcompensated her friendship with Guy with bellowing laughs. In our second to last show, all so comfortable, Guy decided to stretch his vocals as usual.

"My name's Guy Collins and I'm that nigga I-"

"Nah dawg, absolutely not," I flatly interrupted, already fed up with my 93 getting knocked to an 88. "I don't ever want to hear that shit come out of your mouth again. Ever."

My sternness spurred silence though in seconds, it was time for my block of the show. And, just like them photos I took: I was relaxed, reading the teleprompter, smiling. Adrenaline breezed me through the entire D Block with a perky voice, soft eyes and squared shoulders.

Guy had one short, simple line to usher us into commercials.

"Here how we're we ar- making new turns at...Henry Hunter Plaz-Center," Our theme song's trumpet fluttered lightly. "We'll be back with Take 30 News."

"One fuckin' line and I stuttered, fuck." He said, still seeming shook.

Not before the show cut.

"Uh, hey - yeah uh, *Guy*? Did you just curse on *LIVE* television?!" Kevin's voice, still upbeat, rang over the studio mic.

"Um...what are you talking about?" A pink, blushing Guy responded. "No."

"Did any of you girls hear him?"

The girls didn't give up their beloved Guyzy Bear.

"I can't hear too well, earpiece on his side," I said.

That same silence that spooked our studio floor trailed into the post-class discussion circle.

"Now Guy - gonna give you one more chance here," Kevin said, a little sterner in his serious TV voice.

"Dude, no!"

"Well, we did the playback," Kevin thrust his anger through a melancholy "they found two bodies" anchor tone. "And you did say 'fuck' before we cut out. Your performance is a zero this week."

Tuesday we returned to our classroom to critique works for our final show.

"Where's Kevin?" One student, who worked lower-third graphics asked during our pre-scrutiny chatter. "Ready to get this shit over-."

"Could I see my anchors in my office?" Kevin towered at the threshold right on cue.

We followed him to his small hidden office. Teaching his first semester, his maple desk stood naked in the corner. The only other piece of furniture was a comfortable tan leather chair to rest in, popping against the seafoam-colored linoleum floor.

"So as you both know, Guy you've got that zero for last weeks' violation," Kevin started. Guy shrugged like a bad boy. "I also notified...David."

Guy froze.

David, director of the TV center and my junior-year advanced TV production teacher, built our center equipment loan by equipment loan. He had zero tolerance for mess, especially live fuckery.

"David wants you nowhere near our show," Kevin said. "For lying, you won't be participating at all actually. Don't come dressed for camera."

Since we hadn't made eye contact since last Thursday, I watched Guy through Kevin's cold and blank eyes emotionless, sporting that same strawberry face.

Kevin looked at me warmer. "You'll be solo anchoring our very last show. Congrats!"

I had to. So, I did.

@artfulamb | "October 6, 2018 Relax, the dawgs got this. #hailstate | 171 likes"



"Anybody sitting here with y'all?" I asked my softball seat buddy since freshman year Max and his company at Auburn-Mississippi State's football game. Seating arrangements tighten stitches of friendships with future family members, business partners and bridesmaids.

Warm "Yeahs" welcomed me in to sit right below them but then an abrupt "Nah. Somebody sitting here." made me reluctant. It was the cracking voice of Max's future best man, Mr. Jamar Whittingfield.

During the summer back home, I realized Jamar liked my Instagram posts publicly and flirted privately in direct messages.

In the spring, I told Jamar I peeped his drooling lust for me coated in "Yaaaaaas, you thick sis!" compliments even though I was taken. He muscled into my relationship (just too easy for this piece) with mere flirting here and there, then a blatant "I think about fucking you all the time" in the library during finals week.

In its nonfiction nuance, Instagram revealed that I, left on read, was a salacious secret. Embarrassed that I sacrificed two years for four inches and twelve minutes, I blocked Jamar on every possible platform for pursuing me, and winning.

"Why you tripping?" He asked through the Q&A widget when senior year started, noting I was ignoring him. Answering that question on my public profile would've been inappropriate and so was catching Jamar's friends discussing me,

tarnishing my name in our student office. Erupting with anger at a football game would've been just as unbecoming.

It's not like I was drunk enough to fight like frat boys did after embarrassing Ole Miss blowouts. I sat two rows below Jamar, devouring our conflict alongside cold, concession stand chicken tenders. My game buddy Marcus, who'd make a great godfather or uncle, sat next to me, jittery.

"They better win this damn game," Marcus worried. "Losing three conference games in a row would be so ghetto."

"Relax, they got this," I said, huffing irritation inside a large sprite. Funny enough, ego is our Universe's most potent drink and it impaired Jamar with a belligerent arrogance.

He was yelling and screaming about his sports accomplishments of becoming a new men's basketball team manager, like his friends weren't notified the second he got it. Sprinkling "Bitch!" into chorus breaks of Sweet Caroline, as if it ever carried the same energy as Lil Boosie's Set it Off. My ears ringing, I'd turn around and scowl at Jamar. He'd shrug and smile, doing that sway children try when performing innocence. Too bad hiding your hands leaves the face wide open.

At halftime, I climbed up Jamar's "reserved" empty seats to avoid being swept into crowds. He sat down and met with my stony, rigid face, wiping away his hostile joy. I motioned Jamar closer like a boiling mother.

"I will *knock* your mother *fuc-king* head off if you keep fucking playing like that," I funneled rage into a bottled whisper. "I've been trying to be nice to your ass and be cordial, but you think since you around people, you can hoe me *in public*? Don't ever fucking play with me. I will fucking **end** you."

I blended into the halftime concessions crowd, but didn't leave. Surveillancing like a crow on a teleline, I slouched on railings above our section, watching a red-faced Jamar frantically sputter about how he "didn't do nothing," to his friends and Marcus.

"I don't know why you just didn't let her sit, Jamar." Max murmured as I sat back down in sudden, bleak quietness.

State kicked another field goal over Auburn for a comfy, 16-3 lead with 6:55 left in the third quarter. A student propped a cowbell atop his head, hoisting prayer hands in approval. Davis Wade Stadium followed suit. After losing to Florida and Kentucky two games in a row, relaxation finally commenced.

Alex, a younger acquaintance of mine, captured me and Marcus zenned-out in peace with cowbells relaxing on our head, too.

"Take a whole bunch." He snapped 26. Only one trapped Jamar's face behind my cowbell.

@artfulamb | "March 16, 2019 New, true era. | 106 likes"



What is a woman's resolve, may you ask?

Making decisions that bore eras of righteousness from naivety of girlhood. Erasing my former wrongdoings, splitting cliques between patriarchal standards and internalized misogyny. Disbanding toxic ties.

See that wide nose sitting right on the S? Outline of a sweater? That's..."Tiny Duck." My baby. 6'6. 235.

I gave birth to him, us, August 2016. He was a smooth one. Alabama native, a little bit darker than me, near a full beard with white teeth as a teenager, an athletic football body and a goofy personality. Overconfident, he was delighted in my interest since he "snagged a sophomore."

"You made a man out of me!" Tiny Duck screamed at me four months prior to this photo. "I will never forget it but I forgive you because - I love you!"

Our relationship is...we never had one. We were a mirage of a few good fucks but I never committed more than a fling to him. Unfortunately, Tiny Duck left home for Labor Day weekend and returned to find me dating someone else. According to Tiny Duck: my denial of him halted academic progress, athletic ability and destruction of an entire girls' dorm hall, burying his problems in pussy. Quite the manly resolve I must say.

My relationship eventually ended by senior year. Tiny Duck saw his opportunity to revive romantic scraps from our skeleton, arguing that he “never got his shot at loving” me.

He planned to make the hour drive to see me. University stayed open over spring break, so I ran errands before his arrival; Fixed the student account. Reordered another ID. Mapped out remaining semester events, plus scheduling graduation photos.

He said to expect him at 7 p.m.

“Where you at???” He texted me at 2:54 p.m.

“Whittingfield Room, why?”

It was a secret, soundproof room with pecan-colored doors that matched the student union’s wall decor. Twenty plush leather black office chairs huddled around a rectangular glass table. I sat at its head, having a meeting with myself.

“Daddy’s home!” He burst into the room, interrupting. It was 3:17 p.m.

While walking out, I saw furniture scattered around the student union’s open floor.

“I like that,” I said to him, eyeing an empty exhibition room and seeing its upcoming title: “A WOMAN’S RESOLVE.”

I embodied the epigram myself, entering an epoch of my own. That Saturday, it’d been a month since getting purple ombre box braids, partnered with a tomboy plaid cardigan and ripped jeans. These assets signaled me growing new skin, resolving old habits and not chasing ghosts of what could have been if hair less kinky, tits larger, skin lighter.

Instead of finishing my tasks, he dragged me around town to purchase some useless windbreakers from our local thrift store.

“Baby, when’s your birthday?” He asked.

"I know yours is July 31," I said. "You telling me you wanna marry me, but don't know my birthday?!"

"DECEMBER 22!" He yelled out loudly from my bathroom, startling me *again* as I dropped a half-folded blanket on the desk chair.

Reading a book was on that to-do list, too, but before I knew it, Whitney Houston's "You Give Good Love" muffled his deep curses, grunts and moans while I looked beyond his eyes, repurchasing his soul for nearly three hours.

After picking me up from a friends' house that turned into a high venting session, he drove us home too high himself after getting fast food at 2 a.m. "Needing a moment," he sat in his car listening to music for an hour while I dozed off for bed. He knocked on the window at 3:17 a.m., interrupting again, and snored through the night.

Next morning, I asked if we could do it again before he left. He declined, grabbing a crimson towel for a quick shower. Running water felt like it was filling inside my head. His bar of Irish Spring fumigated my bedroom and functioned as a staunch reality check. I reclined - awake, alert and assured: We did not belong together.

He scraped his chiming keys off the graphite-colored granite desk.

"Hey," I pulled my head off the pillow. "I don't think this is going to work."

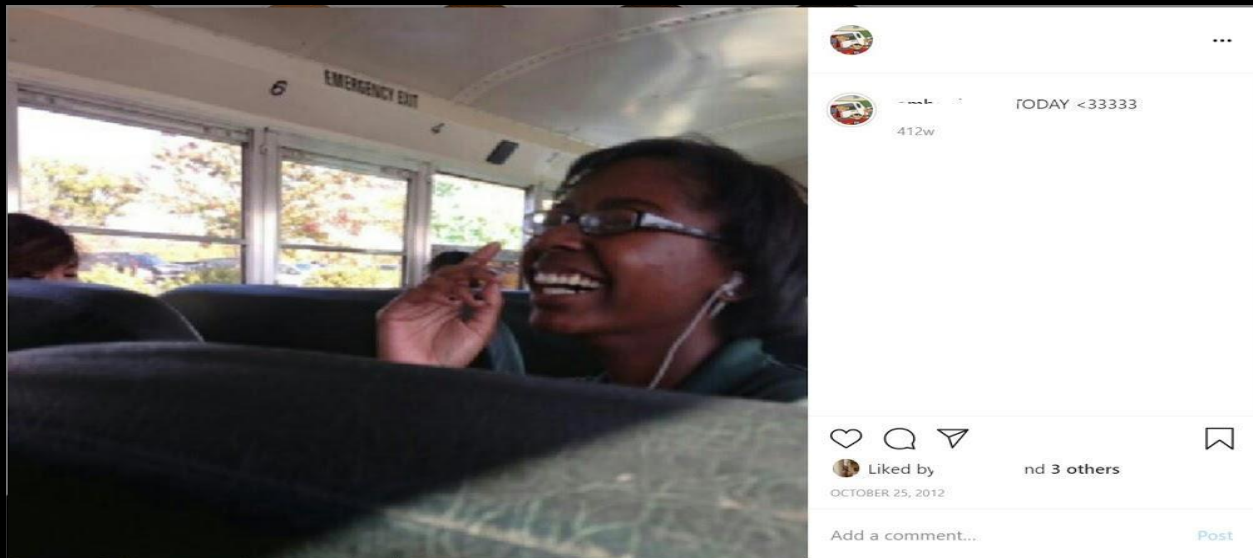
"You always do this to me!" Tiny Duck screamed before throwing the damp towel on the floor. "If you wanted to just fuck, fuckin' say so!"

I called his name as he slammed the door. That was the last time I saw him.

It was a rough decision—one to crush his heart by respecting my own. Guilt tried to poison my mind, but I knew splitting mended our situation.

Tiny Duck would've been labor, one more project I would've readied for someone else's gallery. Moral meals after workshopping men would've rotted by the time that exhausting, self-sacrificial work finished. I released Tiny Duck, investing in my then-current, 21-year-old womanhood. Resolving it, for that matter.

@jeunenuits | October 25, 2012: "TODAY <33333" | 4 likes



And here she is: the most palpable portion of girlhood that ever was.

Rich authenticity in her uninterrupted joy, she's captured in the wondrous magic of laughter using those archaic computer heart signs from 2002, appreciating the "today."

Her best friend snapped these photos on the way to the local community college where they aced college classes two years removed from their tween years. She funneled her boy craziness into Friday night football, feasting on public schoolboys to satisfy private needs. She still collected posters of her favorite pop-punk bands, the music used to zone out noise at her solo library dates. Fluent in sarcasm, she was familiar with disciplinary actions from teachers that couldn't handle a haughty writer suffocating in a STEM environment.

Instagram hadn't trapped her inner Imposter Syndrome yet. Anxieties of attention hadn't swallowed her whole. Chubby rosy cheeks and crooked teeth belonged to her. Dark skin was already in before melanin fan pages said so.

What a young knight, enjoying existence without worrying about faking her nonfiction for praise from peers who never mattered and people that never cared. She, herself then, possessed a soul that shimmered beyond consumption inside square screens.

What a life it was when we didn't fret about fictional likes.