

Oh, the Places I Went.



Paige Aurora Bergen.

legal thing:

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dedications:

To the friends who became strangers and the strangers who became friends. To the ones I have loved and will love. To my inner demons and each angel hugging them. And lastly, to the lost souls - young and old - who will all find their way (you will).

These stories are for you. I hope you find peace, laughter, and solace in them.

foreword:

When I wrote the short story, "I am here." I really wanted to get high after months of being sober.

Instead... I wrote. And wrote some more. Until I had assembled this collection of tales here.

Over the years, I had forgotten why I started writing in the first place. Then I remembered: I started writing because I wanted to reach out to other people like me (and unlike me) and softly tell them, "You're not alone."

So... you're not alone. I am here. We are here together. And life sucks. And sometimes it doesn't suck. And that's kinda cool.

...Was that not inspirational enough? Let me start over.

You're hot. And even though life sucks, at least I get to suck it with you (and by it, I mean dick). Okay, you may proceed.

I am here.

"I hate my mother." I mumble to myself. I'm fumbling in the kitchen, disassociating. What was I doing? Right, bagel.

I choppily slide a butter knife along a too-hard avocado. Does "ripe" mean "too-hard" or "too-soft." I forget. Whatever, it's too-hard, so now I'm prying off the skin in little flakes.

I don't want you to have to move back home. I mean, I'd love it, but I know that's not what you want.

I'm handling it. I'm fucking handling it. Why would she even bring that up? God, I hate her.

A knot settles in my throat. I messily apply the too-hard avocado pieces onto my now-cold bagel. I bite and swallow hard, hoping that'll shove the knot aside (it doesn't).

...

I bite my nails at my computer, applying to more jobs even though I said today I was going to go for a hike or meditate or do something just for me after applying to jobs all week. My fingers still smell earthy from the avocado.

I think about calling my guy, but think better of it. I think about running to ABC and picking up a bottle of vodka, but think better of it. I go to the kitchen, grab a Diet Koke, and return to my desk.

The Koke burns in my throat and my eyes water a bit. Fuck, that's a little better.

I like harsh things. In college, I remember flirting with a girl in the back of a car and we were running our fingers over each other's arms.

She asked me, "Which do you like better: this," she softly ran the pads of her fingers over my tattoo (a quote from a book I now forget the name of), "or that," her square French-tipped nails dragged across my other arm.

I caught her hand when she was done scoring my un-tattooed arm. "That."

I look down at that left arm now, a little less un-tattooed than it was 5 years ago. Imprints left from harsh jabs of inky metal.

"When I get a new job," I say to no one, "I'm getting a fucking tattoo."

...

"Greta!" I don't really have friends, but I met Greta at a photography gig a few months ago and we exchanged numbers. She's nice and Irish and Andrew Scott is Irish, so that's cool.

"Kit!" She hugs me. I hate hugs, but she's small and giddy like a fairy, so whatever. "How are you?"

Eh, wish I was dead. "I'm great! How are you?"

"Fine, fine. You ready to shoot?"

"Yes. I looked over the shot-list again last night to refresh."

"Cool. Let's get started!"

...

I wish this was a paid gig, but god it feels good to be back on a set. People rushing around worriedly with metallic light stands and scrawled-over pieces of paper. Sets are somehow both hushed and deafening.

"Quiet on set!" AD yells. Silence. "Sound speed!" Boom op yells. Silence. Beep. "Cam speed!" I shout. Silence. Silence. Silence.

"ACTION!"

...

I have an interview on Monday. For a junior copywriter position... to train AI.

Mom is thrilled.

A full-time job doing something you love! With benefits! Thank you, Universe!

Mom thanks the universe a lot, but I try not to buy into that crap. Because if the universe was truly a sentient, all-powerful being that could fix everything with a snap of its glossy golden fingers, then why the fuck hasn't it done so already? Why hadn't it done so two months ago? Why hadn't it done so two years ago?

Why the fuck am I here preparing for a job interview that is just going to put me out of a job another two years from now.

God. Why am I here.

...

I called my guy (spare me the lecture). When I'm high, at least I can talk to you. You like talking to me, don't you? It makes you feel a little bit more put-together than me. A little brighter than me. Wiser than me.

You have friends and money and if you're lucky, you still have at least a hint of a dream left inside you.

Don't feel bad about that or worry that I'm jealous. I'm over jealousy. Cherish it. It'll be gone sooner than you think.

I'm coughing. I think I'll die. Sooner than you think. Sooner than you think.

What are you thinking? Write your thoughts in the margins of my mind. Close your eyes.

Do you know what the French call the orgasm? *La petite mort*. You know what that means? *The little death*.

I'm done talking to you now. Catch me in the next chapter.

...

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

I want to cry. To wash some of the shame away. But I know it won't. Shame doesn't wash away. Fuck, why'd I do that? Stupid fuck, you were 8 months in. 8 months gone.

I do start crying.

After a long time, I get up and shower. I try to breathe. Why is it so hard to fucking breathe? I throw up. I watch the chunks of whatever I ate last night float somberly down the drain (ugh, is that pineapple?).

It's bright outside. It's always too fucking bright outside. City of Angel Fucks.

I'm screwed. What if I don't get this job? I need this job. What am I doing spending my money on getting high? What if I keep relapsing? What if--

"Hey, you okay?" I'm on a street corner now and a short Jewish guy with a big Jewish nose is staring at me. "Are you okay?" he asks again.

"Yes, Jesus." I want to book it across the street, but there are cars whipping past. I debate booking it anyway. Maybe I'll get hit and won't have to deal with this guy asking me my least favorite question over and over again. Not that I like questions to begin with.

"You're not okay."

"Then why the fuck did you ask me, man?"

There's a beat of silence amidst the bustling cars. "Are you from New York?"

"What?" I look over his shoulder to see if the light behind him has turned to green.

"You sound like you're from New York."

"What?" I say again, daftly.

"I'm from New York."

"Congratu-fucking-lations!"

"You are from New York!"

"No, I'm not!" I almost laugh. This guy's a trip. "I'm from PA."

"Hmmm, Pennsylvania?" he scans me. It doesn't feel creepy though like it usually does when guys look at me. It's warm. I don't like it.

"Oh my god, fucking what?" What what what.

"Eh, you're New York alright. Come with me, New York." He starts walking and the light turns green for him.

I don't fucking follow him. Who the fuck is this random schmuck? (Schmuck? Am I New York?) "You expect me to just follow some random... dude?"

"What else are you gonna do, New York?"

I fidget in place. He keeps walking, not turning back.

"Fuck it." I mumble and follow.

...

"So, what brings you to L.A.?" he asks.

We're in a coffee shop. The air conditioning feels nice.

"I moved out here for a job."

"What job?"

"Film industry. Post production."

"Wow!"

"They fired me."

"Why?"

More. Fucking. Questions.

I just shrug.

"Hm." He sips his coffee.

He looks a little older than me. Too old for me? I've always been attracted to older men, men in their 30s. But now, I'm 28 so I guess my taste in men is just... appropriate. Anyway, he looks to be in his early 30s. Mark Ruffalo-esque. A bit of scruff which I hate.

Whenever I meet a man, I tend to analyze how much I'd like to fuck them even though I don't really like fucking all that much. I like everything leading up to it I suppose, but fucking itself makes me queasy.

"How old are you?" I say.

"29." Not quite 30. "You?"

"28."

"A fellow millennial."

"I guess."

"I miss Tamagotchis."

I'm quiet. Before I utter, "And Gameboys."

"And Wii Sports Resort."

I look at him. "I fucking loved Wii Sports Resort."

"All the Wii games. But Wii Sports Resort was the best."

"Yeah. I grew up with divorced parents and my dad would always take us on vacations that were always so miserable because... well my dad's an ass, but one year at my mom's house, she got us Wii Sports Resort and my sister and I played it every minute until we had to go back to my dad's. Best vacation we'd ever been on."

He smiles. "That's nice. I wish I had siblings growing up."

"Well, my sister hates me now so." I hate it when I do that. Take something positive and make it negative and all about me. "I'm sorry."

"S'alright." We sip quietly together and watch the cars zip by.

...

I didn't get the job, but I wouldn't have been happy at it anyway. I'll find something. I'm scared, but I'll find something.

I meet up with Ricky on Wednesday so we can work out together at his apartment building's gym. It's a nice building. Brick on the outside, classy on the inside. There's even a mini fridge with--

"Free mini waters!" I say giddily. I grab two and hold them up like they're Grammy's. When you grow up (half)-poor, you learn to appreciate the little things. Especially when they're freeeeeeee--

"Yup." Rick watches me run around, admiring the grandeur of this adequate gym. There are treadmills and ellipticals and... is that Chris Pine?

"Okay, where do you want to start?" he asks.

"Ummm..." My eyes land on a violent, red punching bag.

Rick smiles. "Hey, New York?"

I smirk at him. "What?"

"You wanna beat the shit out of that guy together?"

I shrug. "I mean... he stole my money. And it may sound funny, but I come to get my money back."

He grins broadly. He has nice teeth. I'd like to lick them, but I found out he was gay last week, so he probably wouldn't be into it.

Anyway, we beat the shit out of some poor punching bag to the tune of "You Don't Mess Around With Jim" by Jim Croce.

...

It's late and I'm at my computer again. Not job-hunting. Just writing.

I close my eyes and listen to the tip-tapping sound my fingers make, dancing across the keyboard (I'll fix the typos later).

To my right is a chipped mug with Little Bear on it from when I was a kid. I hold it in my hands and take a sip, feeling the warm spread to my chest, my heart. My eyes tear up a bit.

This feels good.

...

I found out Ricky worked as a professional dancer. He used to strip for a living and made good money. Then, he was a dancer in the New York City Ballet. And now he's here, running a 24-hour vegan diner (homeless people eat free).

"What made you make the switch?"

He gazes out at the ocean, a dimple playfully indenting his cheek. "Dreams change."

We're quiet for a while, the waves whooshing their endless whoosh.

Rick's deep voice breaks the silence first. "So, New York," he says turning to me, "you want the job or what?" And he smiles warmly at me.

I smile back. "Eh, fuck it."

epilogue:

I got a tattoo of a pig. I named him Herbert Sherbet.

Fly.

I masturbated to my Pintrigue board last night. I feel sick. I don't even want to say which board it was...

It was the cottage-core one.

God.

I don't like my body *needing* something like that. All gross and depraved. I hate it. I don't want it.

All I really want is someone to watch movies with.

...

Fly's high again. They're dancing around the room and I'm hiding my smile behind a can of Diet Koke.

"Kit, dance with me!"

"Nah."

"You're so boring now, Kit."

Maybe that's true. I suppose sobriety is the ultimate buzzkill.

They throw up in a wastebasket.

"Woah! You okay?"

I rush over to pungent, chunky, orange goop.

"Too. Many. Cheez-os."

...

Fly and I work at this movie theater downtown. It's a sketchy area but after my very first shift at the place, Fly walked me to my car and has walked me to my car ever since.

I started working there this past June and now it's December, not that that means anything in Los Angeles (it's always Summer here).

Fly and I hang out most days and on the days I don't see Fly, the sky is a little less pink. When we do see each other again, Fly looks tired but giddy, with sparkles in their eyes.

Fly doesn't tell me about the bad shit, but I know it's there. Every time they light a blunt and breathe in, long and slow, I know they're trying to suck in as much good shit as they can before the bad shit hits them in the head again.

Maybe I'll kiss their head and kill all the demons.

"They're dead now," I'll say to Fly, "You don't have to smoke 'em out anymore. Just be here. Just be here."

But I don't say that. I just think it. As my hand sits shakily in my lap, refraining itself from inching across the couch to hold their hand.

"This movie blows." Fly declares and throws popcorn at their chunky TV.

"Yeah," I chuckle.

We finish the rest of the movie in silence. Then we watch another. Then we watch each other. Then we kiss in the dark.

...

After a while, Fly whispers, "When I pick my nose in a public bathroom, I like rolling the booger up into a ball and flicking it onto the floor. Just to prove I've been there."

"Prove to who?"

"I don't know. God?"

"Hm. I masturbated to my Pintrigue board last week and I've felt so guilty, I've wanted to set myself on fire."

"Guilty? Why?"

"The cottage-core lesbians."

"Oh. It's okay."

"I don't think it is."

"It's okay, I think. It's okay. The cottage-core lesbians forgive you."

"Thank you," I say quietly.

Then Fly leans in, kisses my forehead, and tells me everything. And when they start to cry, I hold their hand, and kiss their head the same.

epilogue:

Fly has been sober for two months. We're baking a chocolate cake with strawberry frosting and later we're going to watch *The Lake House* with Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock.

epilogue-epilogue:

The cake was good, the movie was terrible, and the make-out sesh, historical (in a good way).

Cake .

We're making out in a bathroom stall this time. God, boys are so delectable, aren't they?

Is that an okay thing to say? If I said *girls are so delectable*... oh yeah that sounds kinda bad, doesn't it?

But if this dude was cake, I'd eat him the fuck up (sorry?).

So, I lick his neck like frosting. And bite his ear like candy.

And he's smiling, that hot-as-hell joker smile, before he bites me right back.

God, boys are so... mmmmmmmmm...

...

I think I get it now. Being a slut is fucking fun.

epilogue:

Brown eyes are so pretty. And if you have a hot nose, it's all over. As long as you're kind. Yeah, I want someone kind.

The Gym.

Bangs are always a bad idea.

But once a bad idea pops into my brain, I have to see it through. Maybe it's the OCD or the addictive tendencies or a nice cha-cha slide combo with a side of fries collision of the two. Either way, it's inevitable.

God, am I sick of being inevitable.

...

I go to the gym.

"I love your hair, Kit!"

"Thanks, Michele."

I put my ID to the reader with a beep.

"Enjoy your workout!"

I started going to the gym about a year into sobriety. I've found that the itch to get high comes in two-month increments.

The first time I got sober, I made it two months. Then, four months. Then six, and so on.

But once I hit a year, I knew I couldn't break and start from null again.

I needed something to occupy my itchy brain and shaky legs. So, I went online and signed up for an \$11/month membership.

\$11 was nothing. Especially considering I'd normally spend upwards of \$200 a month on getting high. I was getting a deal really.

Who knew life offered discounts?

...

When I run on the treadmill, I like to convince myself I'm high.

I'm high. Nothing is real. I'm weightless. I'm flying.

I have to repeat this in my head. Otherwise, the other thoughts come.

You're fat. You're ugly. Remember that disgusting thing you did in junior high?

But really what ends up happening is both of those voices talk over each other, like two kids with ADHD... on Pez.

I'm high. Nothing is real. You're stupid. You think you're smart, but you're so fucking stupid. Why can't you think straight like everyone else? Or better yet, not think at all? Everyone else can do life. Why can't you? Why can't you do this without drugs? I'm high. I'm high. I'm high.

...

Amidst the garbage noise, there are seconds of clarity. Hits, if you will. Where I breathe in deep and I forget I'm in a smelly gym alongside tired, sweaty strangers.

I'm just in the basement, kissing a blunt. Sucking it like good dick.

And then I let it all go. And sometimes, if I'm running fast enough, I grow wings.

And I don't feel so inevitable.

epilogue:

The bangs are growing out quite nicely.

Meditation.

I always end up back at the diner.

Sometimes I'm with my mom. Sometimes with an ex. But most of the time I'm with a stranger who gazes at me like an old friend.

Then I open my eyes and I'm back home, my legs criss-cross-apple-sauced.

Alone again.

...

Meditating is whack. Sitting still, diving into subconsciousness? I'm already drowning in my subconscious I don't need any more of it thank you.

Dancing is better. Dancing is everything. Blasting music so loud that the subconscious becomes sub-subconscious, buried so far beneath the waves of bass and gritty guitar that strum all thought into oblivion.

And with all the thoughts gone, you shake and spasm. Dying and coming back to life. There is only body and it is only meant to do one thing.

Move.

...

It's Friday. I'm going out.

...

There's someone gazing at me. I can't tell if they're a girl or a guy or just a person. Anyway, they're hot. I've been dancing with this total drip for five minutes and I'm trying to think of a not-rude way to say "You're a horrible dancer. I'm going to dance with that cool stranger in the corner instead. Byeeee!"

I've always preferred honesty over politeness (it saves so much time and energy). Then I found out society preferred the direct opposite. And I didn't want to be weird, so I went along.

But that dies here and now. Because if I don't dance with that tall, androgynous smoke-show (with literally the hottest nose I've ever seen) before they leave, I'll regret it for the rest of my life.

I smile dryly at Mr. Drip and his stiffly swaying hips, spin around, and walk up to Smoke-Show with the Hot Nose.

...

Okay. I felt all confident sashaying my way up to them but now that I'm up close, I'm nervous. Their eyes are so deep and dark with flecks of gold when the club lights hit them.

They raise a tatted hand to say hey.

I do the same.

They extend their hand to me, palm-up. *Gentlemanly*.

I take it.

...

We twist in and out of each other's arms, our eyes meeting again and again until I get so dizzy that I nearly fly out of their arms into some angry-looking bouncer that looks like he might've killed a man before just for fun.

But instead of eating rake, my stranger catches me and we look at each other, suddenly still, amidst the carnival of drunkenness around us.

I can't hear it, but they start to laugh and I start to laugh too.

I can't hear anything over the music. And I don't think anything. I just feel the warm buzz of laughter on my fingertips as I lightly touch their chest and pull them into me.

...

After dancing, we go get waffles with vegan bacon on the side. We also share a fruit platter and sip on black coffee.

"I've been trying to meditate, but I find it hard to get out of my own head."

"Hm, yeah. I struggled with it for a long time too. It takes some time and it's never going to be perfect, but that's also kinda the point."

"Oh." I take a somber bite of my waffle. Mm, syrup.

They smile at me and look down shyly, which makes me grin.

They look up again. "Stop!"

"What? I'm just smiling! This waffle's really good."

"Mmhmm."

I keep grinning until they break too.

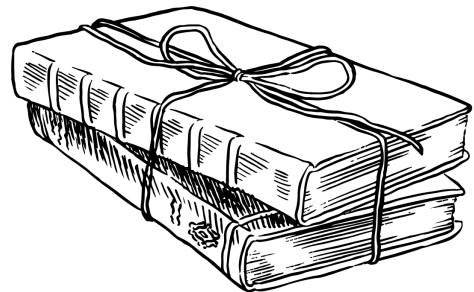
Soon our legs meet and intertwine under the table and we gaze at each other with flushed cheeks and bellies full.

epilogue:

I'm trying to remember what song was playing that night at the diner. Something about old friends... Whatever, Harper will remember. I'll ask them later.

afterword:

For someone who wants not to suck dick in real life, I sure did write a lot about sucking dick. Best not to read into it too *hard*.



I swear to god, I'm mostly gay.
Dick jokes just cum to me so easily.



PAIGE AURORA BERGEN, late 20s, a flirtatious cowboy and cunning writer.

Growing up, Bergen often got out of trouble by making her mom laugh. Later in life, the writer gained an interest in comedy and surrealism through works like BoJack Horseman, Night in the Woods, and Fleabag.

Through her own work, Bergen hopes to show others that, even in the dark, there is always light.

Oh, and she loves her cat a lot. When she, one day, inevitably makes bank, she is going to buy him a veggie farm.

If you liked this whole shebang, plz share with friends. If you hated it, pls share with enemies - they sound hot ;)