

## The Trance of Performance and Other Works

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### The Trance of Performance

I stand facing away from their watchful eyes,  
posing in a still position.  
I feel frozen in time.  
The familiar scents of hairspray and rosin  
fill my nose.  
The lights above me are bright,  
a blinding white.  
My costume clings to my body,  
ready to elongate my careful movements.  
It feels like a second skin.  
The purple lining my legs shimmers and pops  
against the black canvas beneath me.  
Deep breath in,  
it is purposeful.  
The music starts, alerting my senses.  
I feel the tingly sound vibrations travel through my body,  
syncing my movement and thought to the music,  
the rhythm.  
And then I am pulled away,  
into the trance of performance,  
I am so very addicted to.

## The Body of a Dancer

The barre is cold and unwelcoming as I grasp onto it.

It knows my weakness.

I plié to the painfully slow counts of music,

my muscles quivering as I descend.

I can do this.

My dance teacher slowly walks across the room,

her slim figure and impeccable posture taunting me.

“I can see your lunch,” she says.

Her words sting me like the cold air of a winter morning.

I only had a protein bar today.

◆

It is the first day of eleventh grade,

I am excited to be here.

My teacher asks each of us what we like to do for fun,

and I proudly respond with “dance”.

The surprised look that appears on his face wipes the smile off of mine.

“Your legs are so short for a dancer,” he replies.

As he moves on to the next student, my mind wanders elsewhere.

I see a ballerina.

Her legs are long and beautiful.

I envy her.

She has the body of a dancer.

◆

I sit on the floor as I pull my pointe shoes out of my bag.

My eyes trail down my ripped ballet tights,

but stop once they fall upon my feet.

Bruises and callouses cling to them,

refusing to give me a break.

They suffer the consequences of this unrelenting sport.  
That is the body of a dancer.

## Dear Dad, I Forgive You

Dear Dad

I know that our relationship hasn't been great over the last few years,  
and I wish it did not have to be that way.

Growing up without you has been hard,  
but your absence helped to shape my identity as a woman.

I want you to know that mom was more than enough for me.

Her strength and perseverance are attributes I admire,  
but ones I resent you for forcing her to acquire.

Did you think about me while you were straying from marriage?

How your actions were tearing you away from your wife and kids?

I cannot help but feel hurt by your selfishness.

Countless dance festivals went by where I'd look for you in the audience,  
and you wouldn't be there.

Do you even know what my favourite colour is?

The goals that I hope to achieve in life?

The times I do see you, you criticize my decisions and behaviour.

I do not think you have earned the right to do this,  
to act like a parent,

as you have barely been involved in my life.

I want you to know that my ability to build healthy relationships with men  
has been directly hindered by you.

Does he like me?

Will he leave me?

How can I earn his love and commitment?

Am I enough for you to stay?

While some girls cry to their fathers about their first heartbreak,

my first heartbreak was inflicted by you.  
Although your actions have caused me great pain,  
the little girl inside of me does not yet comprehend the complexities of our bond.  
She tightly holds onto the positive memories we made.  
And for that,  
I want you to know that I forgive you.

## Emma

Her eyes are a soft and dark blue,  
like two blueberries,  
too pretty to be eaten.  
She has our Papa's eyes.  
Her hair is short and fine.  
The blonde reflects her yellow personality.  
She has our father's hair.  
Her bedroom is always messy.  
The exact opposite of mine.  
It drives me crazy.  
She did not inherit our mother's organization.  
She loves to play volleyball,  
and she is quick and strong.  
She has our father's love for sports.  
She is smart and outgoing.  
She always knows what to say.  
My shy nature compliments her well.  
I beat her by a couple of years,  
but people always think we are twins.  
She is my partner in crime,  
as my mother would say.  
She is my sister.

## I Was Only Seventeen

It started with subtle pressuring.

He was good at playing innocent,

acting like a caring boyfriend.

I was desperate for someone to want me.

I was oblivious.

You'd do this if you loved me, he'd say.

This is what girlfriends do for their boyfriends, he'd say.

I'll be quick, he'd say.

He was, in fact, quick,

as I lay there wishing I was somewhere else.

But the memory has yet to leave me alone.

♦

It only got worse over time.

The touching became more forceful,

his greedy hands not taking no for an answer.

My heart would pound with panic

as he pulled my shirt off.

Touch is not supposed to feel this way.

I used to struggle, but eventually, I learned to stay still,

letting the moment pass by quicker.

It helped when I let my mind drift elsewhere.

My mind would take me to the dance studio,

or to the swimming pool.

I was too ashamed to tell anyone.

♦

I have been free of him for almost two years.

Although his hands no longer leave bruises along my skin,

he often visits me in my dreams.

The pain,

the shame,

and the fear  
seem so real.  
We are not stopping until I finish,  
are haunting words that will forever replay in my mind,  
as I try to forget with someone new.  
I was only seventeen years old.

## Spills 'n Splashes

Marcus laughs as he successfully shoots a basket while playing water basketball with his two friends at Spills' n Splashes Waterpark. The off-white stand for the basketball hoop creakily lurches forward as the ball goes through, but then bounces back into place. The water splashes aggressively as the men fight to get to the ball first. The trees decorating the grassy area of the waterpark struggle against the wind. This wind only makes the cool water nip worse at Marcus's skin. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees a black, scrawny cat stalk along the outside of the waterpark's fence. His attention is quickly averted to the anxious screams and laughter that can be heard from the waterslide section. Five crows are perched along the worn fence, obnoxiously cawing. His senses are overloaded by all the noise. A young girl walks up to the edge of the shallow pool, seeming out of place. She dives into the water, colliding with the unforgiving tile at the bottom. Her body rises to the surface of the water, motionless. Then the lifeguard's shrill whistle blow fills Marcus's ears.

## Can I Get Your Number?

He stands diagonal from me, peering down slightly, as he only beats my short height by a few inches. His brown eyes are soft but underwhelming. They convey a sense of fear, an awkward nervousness he is trying to hide. There is something off-putting about his face. Is it his crooked nose, bumpy skin texture, or asymmetrical jawline? My eyes avert to his fingers as he passes me his cell phone. His fingernails are uneven, and shamelessly reveal the dirt stuck underneath. An unpleasant itching sensation spreads across my skin at the sight of his scraggly hangnails. His shorts are made of a sporty material, which is out of place compared to his cotton sweater and knee-high socks. The sandals are well-worn and do not convey a sense of put-togetherness. He lifts one of his thick arms and runs his fingers through his black, frizzy hair. I can hear the knots pulling and crunching. Why does he smell like nothing?

## Neapolitan or Rocky Road?

Lauren and Tyler stand facing one another in aisle 9 at their local Jefferson's Grocer. What was intended to be a quick trip to pick up supplies for date night has turned into a bitter disagreement. Lauren hugs the carton of Breyer's Rocky Road ice cream to her chest like it's the last one ever to be made. She glares with disgust at the carton of Neapolitan ice cream that Tyler has selected. Other shoppers awkwardly walk by the couple, trying not to pay too much attention to the obvious tension.

"There are three flavours in Neapolitan," Tyler says with a hint of annoyance. "Rocky Road only has one, so Neapolitan is better. Can't we just get yours next time?". Lauren rolls her eyes. "No! You always get to pick and I am on my period. I should get to choose for once," she shoots back. "You know what, maybe I'd let you choose if I didn't catch you with Jessica last week," she adds with a snarky tone.

A moment of silence passes while Tyler looks around, feeling embarrassed by their public quarrel. "Okay. Fine. As long as you'll stop whining about it," he says, roughly pushing past her to put the Neapolitan ice cream back in the freezer. Lauren triumphantly smiles and skips towards the register at the front of the store. Tyler slowly follows her, dragging his feet in defeat. Jessica would have definitely let him pick Neapolitan.

## The Gate Was Open

It was mid-July, and my mom's sister and her family were here to visit for the week. While the adults stayed inside to visit, Emma and I stayed outside to entertain our little cousins. The rusted metal on our trampoline squeaked as the little girls jumped away, sending shivers up my arms. I peered up at the sky, and worry started to invade my stomach as the dark and determined clouds started to roll in from afar. "I think we should go inside soon," I said, trying to sound convincing. "Once it starts raining, we will go in," my sister replied. I nodded in compliance, still feeling uneasy about the weather.

Winston, my Aunt's dog was tied up on the other side of our yard, pacing back and forth. The girls were still occupied with the trampoline, so I decided to go pet him. The black crow that flew above my head and cawed startled me, and Winston started to whine. Suddenly, I felt the cold and wet drips of rain start to hit my bare shoulders. I hate that feeling. "Okay let's go inside now," my sister said, encouraging the girls to quickly get off the trampoline. Without thinking much about it, I unclipped Winston from his leash. The gate to our yard was open.

It all happened so fast. Winston bolting across and out of our yard, my sister calling and running after him, and my heart beating so fast. I was frozen, I didn't know what to do. There was so much talking going on, and everything was moving in slow motion. I finally got myself out onto the street, and I saw Winston across the street, obviously wanting to play. The rain started to come down harder, and I heard thunder rumble in the distance.

As my sister tried to approach Winston slowly from the side, he decided to run back towards the house to get away from her. He thought it was a game. The black truck rounded the corner of our street, coming out of nowhere. Before I had time to realize what was happening, the front tires of the truck collided with Winston's tiny body. What have I done?

## That is No Job For a Woman!

Ava woke up at 5:45 a.m. and rolled out of bed to start getting ready for work. Her husband, James, had already gotten out of bed to start his daily duties: cleaning the house, making Ava a coffee, and packing her lunch. Ava was on her way out of the bedroom and noticed that the laundry had not been started yet. James was going to hear about this.

James rushed around the kitchen, getting everything ready so Ava would be happy. She entered the kitchen with a scowl on her face. "You know, with the hard work I do and the money I bring in for this family, it would be nice if you could at least get the laundry done," she said sourly. "You stay home all day. I just don't understand why you can't be more on top of things when you have so much time. Is my coffee ready?", she added.

"I'm sorry honey," James passed her the coffee and her bagged lunch. "It's just hard when I have the twins to take care of during the day," he tried to explain. "You know, it would make me really happy if you helped me with some of the house chores sometimes," he suggested. Ava looked at him like he just spoke in Latin, and decided to ignore his suggestion. "The dishes better be done with supper on the table when I get home," she said sternly, before marching out the door for work.

At work, Ava started to complain to some of the other lawyers about James. "It would be much less stressful for me if I had an obedient house husband, you know?", she vented. She then went on to tell her coworkers about his suggestion for her to start helping out with the chores around the house. "Chores?" Lucy exclaimed with disbelief. "That is no job for a woman! He should understand his place in the household," she continued. Ava could not agree more. She loves her husband, but he needs to respect



that she is the head of the household, and he needs to serve her. It can't be that hard to be a stay-at-home house husband, right?