



*I WAS NOT BORN*

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*julia cohen*

## OF RECOVERY

Born in a deadlight? Stop teasing. Furnace full of patient stars. Here because I could not abandon love: coffee grounds, a box of opened cereal, cherry magnets. My bed unburdened by sex? To hold nothing against nothing. To hold nothing against.

The mental hospital takes: your shoes, your pens & pencils, your belt, your computer, your iPod, your cell phone, your wallet, your passport. For 10 days I keep N's brown wallet in the front pocket of my backpack. I take it out every night, hold it in my hands like a dead starling. I look through his IDs. I look to see if he left a note. Nope.

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In 10 days I visit 19 times.

In 10 days we play 26 rounds of Scrabble.

In 10 days I tell almost no one.

In 10 days I bring N 17 meals.

In 10 days I cry at unexpected times.

In 10 days I do the laundry once so I can bring  
N clean shirts. I bring the blue & white striped  
collared shirt, it's his oldest & feels like worn  
pajamas.

In 10 days I wash the kitchen floor.

In 10 days I meet N's social worker, young &  
chipper.

In 10 days I buy Clorox & scrub the bathroom.  
Even the shower.

In 10 days I clean out the fridge. Shriveled pep-  
pers. Salsa with a moldy lid.

In 10 days N's doctor asks me if I plan to stay with  
N. Of course, I say.

In 10 days I vacuum the living room & hallway.

In 10 days I wait until the ninth to throw out N's  
noose.

Light could not look. Inside my lung, the night.  
I'm not dry land. Pages stuck together. So creep-  
ing so day. Origin in simile. To subdue exploits. If  
I thought fruit could impart, I would sample from  
each seed. Untidy summer. Not afraid of child-  
birth, afraid of sex *after* childbirth. Firstlings cling  
or canter with help. A city named vengeance. In  
tents, years blink out like seeds crushed from a  
lemon. To make room by reduction: sink. This one  
is taken? Bite of fig & ice-cream. A living. Out of  
architecture, "Dibs."

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Questions I can't ask: Why weren't you going to leave a note? What other methods of suicide did you consider? You were going to leave me without knowing how to cook collard greens & black-eyed peas? Without knowing how to make tofu-scramble? How many lies did you tell to sustain this deceit & what did they feel like? Who would identify your body? I once watched a TV show about how dogs won't accept the death of their owner unless they see/smell their owner's dead body. Otherwise they'll keep waiting at the door. I'd have asked permission from the police to take our dog with me to the morgue, to accept.

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Remember: N reads to me in the bathtub.

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### **Therapy Session #7:**

**J:** Last week we were talking about external experiences that test or...within seconds transform how you conceive of yourself. But I felt like I walked away from the conversation not knowing what to do with that information. Like, letting outside things have such a strong effect. I guess? Reading a

book about questioning gender when I was twelve & then letting that obsessively take over or dismantle my positioning of self...

**Dr:** That sounds like you're choosing for things to go that way, which is not quite the way it seems it went. But rather, it happened automatically. Jumping back to your first point, I don't know if we got to necessarily what we were supposed "to do" with it, but simply understand what happens. You described this experience at an all-girls school of stumbling upon a book that questioned sexual orientation, that first was a notion & then became a preoccupation, & then you weren't sure what you were supposed to hang onto about your own orientation.

**J:** Right, yes. I mean, that was one of those larger moments, but I feel like I have the tendency to obsess about many things &, not that there is a proper place to put something or that one should compartmentalize, but I feel like I don't know how to quiet some thoughts down. Not that events happen all the time where I lose track or feel destabilized from who I am, but rather I'm socially anxious. I'll send an email when I'm tired & feel like I got my thoughts wrong, & then if the person I sent it to doesn't get back to me right away, I'll obsessively think about how he or she could

have misinterpreted it wrong & I was accidently offensive. Then three days later they do respond & are like, “you sounded tired in your email...” so I feel like there is some sort of concern about how other people understand you that’s healthy & then in certain instances I can take it to this other level that’s unproductive & time-consuming. That’s where I get afraid in regards to how I’m considering my relationship with N. I can’t decide whether I’m thinking about this situation most of the time because it’s what any one would do if her relationship was in a complicated place, or if I’m contributing to my own unease by having this take over my thoughts.

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My calamine-blitzed child. Lucky licit, I claim a mountain & adjoining lake I know what’s lunging. Tetchy water or feeble soil. Like a future roof, the fingernail un-creases aluminum foil. My makeshift. My lifelike.

Will someone string cold lights through the tulips? Will someone close grief’s atlas & ship the salt to bookend the night?

Someone briefly touches my shoulder while I sleep. Moat, moat, moat. My arm like a drawbridge lowers to the grasses, an unstamped postcard,

slight glances through curt branches, grey trousers, the hand-drawn airplane. Addresses. I pack myself with milkweed & thistle. Season of what?

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Remember: We write poems together by email, by text message, on car rides, side by side at a bar.

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The noose is longer than I thought it would. A surprisingly smooth cord, soft & glossy like a doll's braided hair.

For nine days I peek into N's backpack but don't touch it. Standing by the blue dumpster to decide whether to untie the noose, turn it back into knotless rope, or toss it in as quickly as possible. I'm compelled to destroy the evidence, to leave usable rope for those who pilfer our dumpster. N tells me he looked up how to knot a noose on the internet. I try to picture him researching this at Whole Foods or the library where I go to play Scrabble & check Facebook. He says the instructions were easy to follow. The cord, bought locally at Ace Hardware.

Remember: N writes for me, "I will warm your frozen hands / in my cold hands."

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