

Samantha Allen

## Snapshots

### ***I - April 2008 / Mount Sinai Hospital / New York City:***

It is the earth before the first day. Formless and void, darkness spread upon the face of the deep. There is no dimly heard fade-in of monitoring metronomic beeps. No soft-focused nurses appear between my exploratory blinks. Nothing.

And God says, Let there be suffocation: and there it transpires at the top of Mount Sinai.

A pillar of fire is down my throat. It burns all the way down to my center. *It's plastic*, I realize before vomiting into it. And from the firmament an urgent voice issues a command made all the more alarming because it means that homeostasis has failed me:

“Breathe.”

I have ears to hear. They wrap themselves around this exhortation, my other senses still stuck in the ether.

“Breathe.”

I am a woman blind from birth. For a fleeting moment, this one verb—*breathe*—constitutes the sum of my awareness.

“You have to breathe.”

I return like a dog to my own vomit, swallowing it back in a vinegary gulp. And then I am breathing. Prosthetically. Now that the commands have ceased, I can hear the wheezing of the machinery that's keeping me alive. My first profound post-surgical observation: *I sound like Darth Vader breathing: Hoo Pii. Hoo Pii.*

On the real Mount Sinai, a hemisphere away and centuries ago, God commanded the people who would someday finance this Mount Sinai, “Honor thy father, that thy days may be long upon the land.” For a few terrifying moments while my breathing stabilizes, I worry that God wasn't kidding.

I am one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb. Dumb by virtue of the tube. Testing a provisional form of communication, I reach for my mother's hand and painstakingly carve out a message, letter by letter in the palm of her hand. And the dumb  
  
spake:

L-U-K-E-I-A-M-Y-O-U-R-F-A-T-H-E-R.

***II - October 2007 / Grocery Store Parking Lot / Provo, Utah:***

My father reads me like a CD-ROM. He registers the gaps, translating the spaces between conversations into data more meaningful than any words we actually exchange. *He's just a finely-tuned piece of equipment, I tell myself, a precision laser, probing the patterns of words spoken and things left unsaid.* But Arthur C. Clarke once drew an equivalence between “sufficiently advanced technology” and “magic” and it's the possibility of Dad being a magician that terrifies me.

“... many returned missionaries ... distractions ... adjusting ... slump ... worry about you ... happened to me too ...”

I read my father like a line graph. I plot a few key phrases and fill in the rest.

My groceries are in the backseat as I take the call, apples rolling around in a plastic bag as I take a sharp turn onto Freedom Parkway. As the conversation grows awkward, my mind starts to roll with them. I can see our future together, simple sugars running in rivulets down my chin. I will not be any wiser. The gods will be safely, exclusively omnipotent. But I will be part of something crude and sensuous, messy and sweet. And returning from this reverie, I find that the words I am hearing have lost their intelligibility. Now, at the core of this matter, there are parted, even lips and the shimmering sex of apple trees.

“I'm sick of words,” I say. With words. Hypocritically.

And more words in response:

“... someone who has received the manifestations that you have ... not purely intellectual ... worthiness issue”

I tune in just in time to catch the question in statement's clothing. Have I sinned? Yes. Let's not beat around the bush. It's already burning.

***III - April 2008 / Black Horse Pub / Mendham, New Jersey:***

We are at a last supper of sorts. Open heart surgery eve. The waiter arrives. *Take, eat; these are my crab cakes.* Dinner is ordinary but only under duress.

Across the table, Dad furtively writes on a napkin in his characteristically boxy lettering. He doesn't think I can see it:

WHEN I WAS YOUNG I ASKED MY FATHER FOR BLESSINGS.

MY CHILDREN NEVER ASK ME FOR BLESSINGS.

Tomorrow my rib-cage will be as parted as a missionary's hair. The waiter returns - his second coming. But Dad's napkin escapes the great day of his wrath. It is slipped into his pocket, where it will be kept safe well beyond the seventh seal.

***IV – September 2007 / Wyview Apartments / Provo, Utah:***

I am the woman with an issue of blood twelve years. I feel the healing in my body and my hands reach down to confirm, sliding over my cleansed flesh to find

surfaces long obscured. My fingers find grooves they last used a decade ago as faint memories of pleasure tickle at the edges of my awareness.

I am the woman with the alabaster box of ointment. I have different plans for its

contents. The Pharisees were right about me. I must be as slick as sinners are.

I am the woman at the well. I have found the living water. It is a well that bubbles

up inside of me as I stroke, soaking to the point of saturation, then springing up into everlasting life.

***V – January 2006 / Middle of Nowhere / Wyoming:***

Route 80 slows to a funereal crawl as snowdrifts swallow the Wyoming horizon. If the Lord were to appear in a shimmer, the exceeding white of his raiment redundantly superimposed on the white of the driven snow, I would be ripe for a test of commitment: all that I have is in the back of this car.

At a pace of perpetual rubbernecking, we pass jackknifed trucks and snow banks peppered with cars. We could die out here, but Dad would die happy: my success

is entirely contingent upon his advice.

“If you have to brake, tap the brake gently so the tires don’t slip.”

Obedience is the first law of heaven. I tap the brake.

“Keep enough speed so that you can make it over that ridge without having to accelerate uphill.”

I must abide the celestial law to abide celestial glory. I let the car glide down the hill.

The traffic freezes like everything else and we come to a stop. I would sell all and follow Him. I would run up and down the aisles of traffic, pawing off my possessions with frostbitten fingers. “Dorm room decor for sale! Any takers?”

An hour goes by. No cars do. And at the height of my piety, I suggest a prayer.

Our heads bow in studied solemnity as I begin to importune – “*Dear Heavenly Father*” – I have to express gratitude before I can ask for blessings – “*We thank thee for this time that we have to spend together*” – but He knows the game; I want something, don't I? – “*We thank thee for the atonement of thy Son, Jesus Christ*” – I hope that my affectation can carry these rote words – “*We ask thee to help us arrive safely at our destination and to help us navigate this storm*” – He knew it was coming, didn't he? – “*And we say these things, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.*”

“Amen.”

It is the last time Dad agrees with me.

## Author Bio

Samantha Allen is a 26-year old transgender woman and an ex-Mormon. She is also a third-year PhD student in the Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Emory University writing a dissertation on practices of sexual fetishism. In her leisure time, Samantha writes music and dreams of inhabiting the universe of *Twin Peaks*. Samantha's first scholarly publication 'Whither the Transvestite? Theorising Transvestism in Feminist and Queer Theory' is forthcoming from *Feminist Theory* in Volume 15, Issue 1, April 2014.

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