

1

I decided to wear a kimono and high heels to the party because I wanted people to see me in a kimono and high heels at the party. I tried putting chopsticks from the kitchen drawer in my hair and it felt like it was overdoing things a bit, so I put them back. I even considered painting the chopsticks black because they were brown, and black would have suited my outfit better. Yet the fact that I considered painting them at all caused me to be embarrassed at myself, so I decided to ditch accessories that were at one time used to stuff pad thai into someone's face. Painted or not, you can't change the reality of what chopsticks are or the main way that they've been used for, like, centuries. Eons, even. So let a chopstick be a chopstick, and my hair can be what it is, too.

I've fantasised for days about wearing this kimono and these shoes and tonight is the night. The shoes are high and patent and black and shiny, and the kimono is red and silky with sleeves like wings. I guess the sleeves are a part of a traditional style, or whatever. It's just that my only association with them is that they're like wings. I don't know why they're so wide, or if that has some kind of practical aspect to it, and, you know, who cares.

I've put a tight black spandex skirt underneath for modesty. Well, it's a half-hearted gesture in the direction of modesty. I'm not wearing underwear of any kind because that would be ridiculous.

The people who are going to see this outfit and me in it are both known and unknown to me. I mean, I've been invited to this party. Like, I'm legitimately allowed to be there. It's just that my self-image is in no way going to be constrained by knowing too many people in attendance. I won't be readily identifiable to the majority of the crowd, so who and what I am can remain undefined, and expansive.

And, right now, from my perspective, the people who are going to be there are made up of Futuristic Shadow Beasts Without Faces that are deeply impressed by me. They make life worth living, because I can decide exactly who and what they are, from this place of having no actual idea. I can just imagine them, and dress for them, and have high expectations of them, and envisage the amazing connections that I might have with them. And I hope that all of the Futuristic Shadow Beasts Without Faces are currently giving themselves the same rapturous, pre-party experience that I am. Because even if we don't get a chance to meet, or to talk, we can remain in a state of wonderment together. My dream is to leave people wondering, and nothing more. It's safe, it's sexy, and I want to live there forever.

Mystery is my favourite accessory.

As I get ready, I keep looking over my shoulder just in case someone walks into the room unannounced. My music is loud, and I'm worried that someone will knock and I won't be made aware of their presence until it's too late, and who knows what

they will have witnessed or, worse, how they'll perceive what they have witnessed. I don't even want to think about it.

It's one thing to be humiliated for my own reasons and a whole other thing to be the catalyst for someone else's sense of humiliation. I really don't want to take on that responsibility. I've always felt a strong inclination to smooth things over for the people around me, and now I've become terrified of the prospect of having to do so at all. I'm not really wired to care for other people unless they ask me directly because, in any given situation, I'm either completely immersed in myself, or completely immersed in someone else. There's no in-between.

Anyway. I keep sensing footsteps down the hallway and it's fucking annoying. They're echoing around my ribcage, and, I mean, no one ever walks in. How did I get to a point where I feared that they might? Every strand of hair is standing on end and my neck is moving like a magnet towards the door. Why? Is it self-obsession? Paranoia? Anxiety? My inner processes can be visceral to the point of being completely illusory, and absurd. Thankfully I live with a cat called Porkchop who is a very grounding influence upon me.

Porkchop is ginger and his job is to sit on my bed and stare at me, and he's very good at it. It was a self-appointed position, and he never lets the team down. I once read in a book that we need to be wary of growing too close to animals, because it can reveal a lack of closeness with our own species, and, around the same time, a boyfriend read aloud a section of a novella, which said that people who empathise with the animals involved in bullfighting don't empathise with human beings — like, at all — and that they're more likely to be psychopaths. We were in his kitchen

when he shared this with me, and I remember taking a deep breath, from my shoulders, and quietly mashing more clumps out of the guacamole.

Connection with my own species has been difficult. I'm more at ease with the animal part of myself than the human part of myself. I feel at peace when I'm with Porkchop. I have no concerns about what he might or might not be thinking, or what might or might not happen next. Porkchop is always clear about his wants and needs. They aren't hidden behind lies, or delusions. They're right there, in the sunlight, wanting a tummy rub. Or, they very obviously prefer tuna to sardines, because the sardines are left on the plate and the tuna isn't. Or, they've carefully positioned the ball of string at the bottom of the stairs, because it's playtime.

Porkchop and I access a sense of wholeness that I rarely experience anywhere, or with anyone else. Our non-verbal union recreates the stillness of the respective wombs we left long ago. We can't be all that different, really, because we pretty much came from the same place, and now we're here, living in the same place, and one day we'll die, and end up in the same place.

Porkchop must feel the same way, because he doesn't go anywhere. That cat barely moves due to being so overcome with contentment in our space together. Everything that he does, and every sound that he makes, and every bit of smoked salmon that he licks, and carefully chews, suggests the utmost confidence in his decision-making capabilities. I see no reason to question Porkchop's level of commitment. I can trust the satisfaction that he experiences at my side, because when people or things want to move on, they just do.

Porkchop is also a potent reminder of why I don't eat anything like, or associated with, pork chops. I look at Porkchop and I feel safe in the knowledge that I don't eat his kind, or take what wasn't given to me by his kind. Porkchop isn't a sandwich, and he doesn't belong on a barbecue. He's a cat, and he lives with me. Just like all of the animals living alongside humans everywhere, every day, all the time, at every corner of the earth. Not just in houses or on farms. They're in the sea, and in the air, and in the jungles, and rainforests, and in the native parklands, and in all of the other places that animals are, which is heaps and heaps of places. We've all ended up here together, and that's all there is to it, because that's all the knowledge that we have about it.

Symbolically, Porkchop is 'every animal' to me and I love him dearly. Look at him. He has a little soul, which has an agenda that miraculously involves staring at me all day. I feel so blessed.

Sometimes when he sits on my lap, I tell him that he's a god, and he shuts his eyes with what I'm sure is a gentle, appreciative knowing. We're all gods, and the ancient Egyptians withheld from those who refused to accept that.

An ex-boyfriend once said that I should 'stop trying to be Holly Golightly' with my cat, and I said that he should stop relating everything back to the first pop-culture reference that pops into his head, because it won't make him any more relevant or useful to the tribe. And relating me to a man-made fantasy of womanhood said more about him than it did about me. He's in advertising now where he belongs, and we spent a year together that I don't really think about unless I'm talking to my therapist.

2

I like to sip vodka martinis with olives before I go out, because Dad used to make a vodka martini with olives for Mum every night before dinner. It was their evening ritual. After a long day of writing and researching, he'd put on Artie Shaw and roll out a bowl of pistachios. Mum would put her feet up on the coffee table, snap the shells open with her long, pale-pink nails, and suck the salt off, before taking a sip of the brew and crunching a nut.

Dad took a lot of pride in the fact that he made the strongest martinis anyone in his circle of friends had ever drunk. Grown men were often seen keeling over on the lawn outside after a few of Dad's martinis. He never drank them himself.

Vodka martinis with olives are a family tradition that I've chosen to celebrate and embrace. There's something very decadent and straight-to-the-point about a vodka martini with olives. There's no yeast or citrus or bubbles to be used as a distraction. And I like to experience life directly and intimately so, naturally, I like to drink alcohol that is direct and intimate. Drinking vodka in this way, you get to feel every bit of it. There's no hiding from a vodka martini with olives.

Gin doesn't taste the same, or have the same feel about it, and I'm not sure why. Vodka is cold and clear, and it hits the bottom of my stomach like an axe, so, sorry to the guy I once dated who liked gin with soda and cucumber in it, it's just that that's a completely different thing. My family's martinis don't have a drop of gin in them, and there's nothing more to be said about that subject because it will get boring.

3

I used to get ready to go out with other girls because that's what girls are supposed to do and it's meant to be all *Grease* without the bullying, except the bullying is always there. That's why Sandra Dee ends up singing about Danny outside by herself, next to a play pool, in a white nightie. And if you looked at my best friend and me during high school, you'd think I was Rizzo and she was Sandra Dee, and that would be a misconception. Maybe every woman thinks that would be a misconception.

My hair was long, thick, brown, and wavy, and hers was white-blonde and straight. My hair looked different depending on the weather, and on how I had slept, and on how I had chosen to wear it the day before, and on what I had been thinking about too much, and hers was always the same. Like, exactly the same. Even after she washed it. She would try to cut it in different ways to create variation, yet every layer would remain visible and readily identifiable.

Try as she might to embrace unpredictability, her very being refused it. She did everything she could to rail against sameness and monotony. She moved across the landscape of life like a

lightning rod: fast, primed, and ready for the next destination to electrify with her presence. She always had a bag in hand or over a shoulder in preparation for leaving. Her sky-blue eyes would rapidly assess situations, and people, before turning their attention back to a heavily distorted body image, which would shriek at her from every mirror and shop-window reflection.

During summer at the beach, I would play in the shallows like a mermaid and read novels filled with sand as she chased surf lifesaver boys past the break and inhaled freshly made salad sandwiches in front of them. The act of eating and nourishing herself was a spectator sport for the benefit of men and boys only. Eating like that always required an audience, because it was a public testament to a degree of normalcy that she practised nowhere else. She never ate with such gusto when we were alone together or, if she did, it became swaddled in a sense of guilt so palpable that we both suffocated.

It was easy to get caught up in the swell of her energy, and expectations. I have an extraordinary capacity to be taken way out of my depth by the desires of others, and I'll never forget the time I tried to chase her chasing the surf lifesaver boys past the break and I was dunked repeatedly. The tide knew exactly what the fuck was up, and it knew how to say it to me without tentativeness or restraint.

Stop.

She loved going to parties with me because her body had a lot more to say to the opposite sex than I did. Her big cheekbones, and white-blond hair, and large breasts made for very engaging conversation. Yet she often became fed up with the limitations of this. She wanted to be seen as more than a plaything. So she

would try and beat the boys at drinking games I didn't want to have anything to do with, and she would crack sex jokes that I didn't understand.

I lived poetry and she lived politics. When she lost her virginity, it was because she wanted to get it over with, and when I lost mine, it was because the stars were bright, and I was infatuated.

One night she had a dream about sprinting against a group of other women in order to 'win' the affections of a guy that she had set her sights upon. She awoke from the dream, arrived at brunch, ordered a soy latte and scrambled eggs on sourdough, and asked me what it meant. As her loyal soothsayer, I gently said that it seemed to reflect the ways in which she allowed the whims of men to dictate the parameters of her existence, and that she obviously saw herself as being in competition with other women. She looked at me, smiled, and said nothing. She enjoyed being seen, regardless of what other people saw. I admired that about her.

She won't be at the party tonight because she's already married to a mortgage, two dogs, two cars, one baby, another on the way, a man without a job who golfs on Saturdays, and a large plasma-screen TV that stays on in the background when you go to spend time with her. And I've never been able to find a suitable pre-party replacement. Because while she was busy chasing surf lifesaver boys, and sprinting against other girls, she won my heart, and she still has it.

4

These days I prepare to go out on my own. Well, technically it's on my own. It never feels like it, though. Everything comes alive when I'm technically by myself.

Earlier tonight, I started the festivities in the bathtub. I soaked in warm water with Epsom salts, and castor oil, and vitamin C, and diatomaceous earth, and bush flower essences, and bicarb soda, and peony rose petals from the garden. Peonies are the only roses that I have growing in the garden, because I have the greatest affinity with them and, I know, I know. Germaine Greer would be all like, 'Can women please start comparing themselves to something other than roses?' and I'd be all like, 'Whatever, Germaine.' Peonies are my homegirls.

I've got fluffy pink Angel Cheeks, voluminous Fairy's Petticoats, wholesome-looking Etched Salmons, electric-yellow Claire de Lunes, sumptuous Coral Charms, fuchsia-coloured First Arrivals, and wedding-gown-white Mother's Choices all moving in circles around one another, and they've gone absolutely wild. Their multiple layers delicately curl into themselves and flop outward with such abandon. I've hung a hammock next to where they're

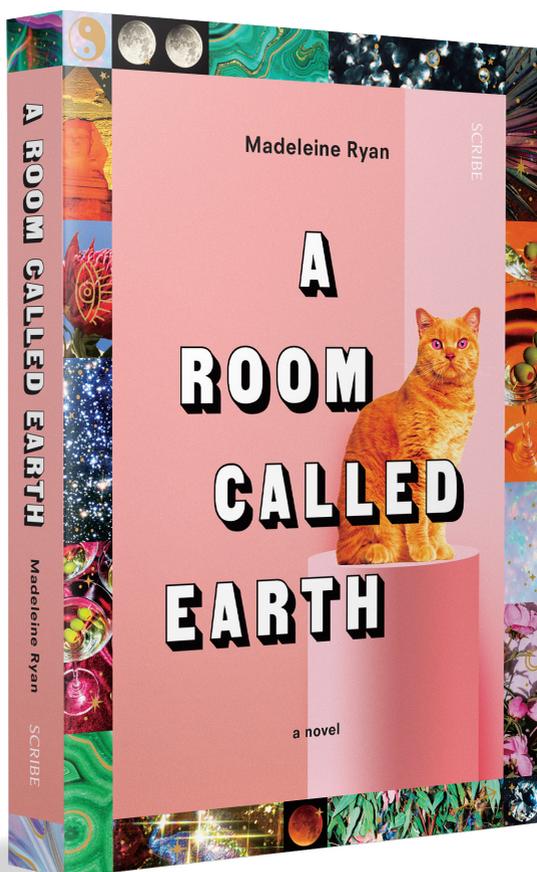
all planted so that I can emulate their state when I feel inspired to. Which is, like, every day.

I've also added a few drops of bergamot, sandalwood, and geranium essential oils to the bath because, together, they fill the space with a fragrance that smells like the chambers of ancient Egypt. Or at least what I imagine the chambers of ancient Egypt to smell like. It's how I'd hope for them to smell.

If there were one place I would like to travel to in third-and-fourth dimensional time and space it would be ancient Egypt. Which, of course, is problematic. And I don't really fly in planes, because I can't make sense of them. I can make sense of birds and insects, and the way that they fly, because people didn't make birds or insects, or come up with the way that they fly. I don't trust or understand the things that people make or come up with. I feel safer with nature. It's just there, for everyone to see, touch, taste, smell, and hear. There's a simplicity to it that puts me at ease.

Every season is like a teacher gently guiding me, and Christmas in Australia brings the greatest teaching of all: summer. Right now, it's Christmas Eve Eve, and it's the best. I've never had a white Christmas and I wouldn't want one. Every day since the beginning of December I've spent time lying in the glades outside, lapping up all of the negative ions, and feeling held and recharged. I've doused myself in DIY sunscreen — almond oil, coconut oil, zinc oxide, red raspberry seed, shea butter, and carrot seed — and life has made sense to my body, and my mind. The world and all of the strangeness of being here no longer seems baffling, or ridiculous. It seems obvious. I mean, of course I'm here, where else would I be?

Although, lying on the grass for too long can sometimes be disorienting: it starts to seep in that I have no beginning and no end, and that everything is moving and vibrating and I might fall into the sky. Then I remember that the earth and the sky are my real mother and father and lover, and I feel calm again.



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