

OFF THE RECORD: PRIVATE TRUTHS FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION  
BY KYRA COUSINS

1. Suppose I were to begin by warning you that this book has no beginning, it has no end. Suppose I were to make you my confessor and spent these pages dancing between thoughts and worlds and ideas. Suppose I asked that when I passed you and you passed me, we pretended as if this was all a dream. We would lock eyes, and for a second, just a second, we might consider all I had shared, and then the moment would be over, eyes unlocked, thoughts untold. Suppose all of that and more, would you still read it?
2. And so I wrote a book. I'm at the tail end now. At this stage I can't really believe what possessed me to do it or that I did. I wanted to step out of my shell, try something new, put my heart on paper.
3. These pages ooze the blood in my veins.
4. I wanted to go to France. Have my Sabrina<sup>1</sup> moment, overcome my life obstacles, comeback fluent.
5. Time has been my cruelest co-author. The days either stretch out into a limitless horizon leaving me parched, yearning, wandering from mirage to mirage hoping for a taste of something else, an end in sight. Or they leave me gasping, sputtering, kicking with all my strength to not get sucked under as the river rushes around me, unyielding, uncaring. So long I think they'll never end, so fast I'll barely catch them.
6. The weeks slip away the same way we forget about last week's news story and the months expire the same the flowers you forget do.
7. Somehow, I thought time would be kind to me. I had so much of it. But the clock is ticking, the hours are going by. The past increases, the future recedes. Possibilities decreasing, regrets mounting.

8. Do you think I can have that monogrammed? I'll put it on a pillow.
  
9. Time is different depending on what you're doing, everyone knows that. Five minutes of your favorite song Isn't nearly as long as five minutes of being berated by your boss or friend or parent. When I crack open a book, the world stops. There's nothing like holding a book in my hands and turning the pages. Time still stops when it's digital, but it's not the same. There's a sense of comfort, familiarity. I've been here before. I know what to do. Rest, we'll take it from here. My eyes stream over the words and they spill into my mind painting pictures and recreating scenes. To think when I'm there, the world continues without me.
  
10. I didn't realize that during quarantine.
  
11. Stories kept me alive during quarantine. As I've read them I've laughed bigger and wider and more readily. Read this "The artists were a dying breed, in all honesty, which is why the government, along with a few wealthy do-gooders, put them in cages—nice cages—that resembled the artists' natural habitats. One pen looked like a gallery opening, with wine, cheese, and water crackers restocked daily. Another featured dumpster couches paired with a threadbare oriental rug. Nude models were occasionally sent into the enclosures, which sometimes interested the artists, sometimes not. These habitats were all very thoughtful—top-of-the-line, really—and tailored to the artists' individual needs. In fact, one could argue the environments were identical replications of how the artists lived in the wild,"<sup>2</sup> Amazing.
  
12. Maybe I liked Allegra Hyde's story so much because I too was in a cage, though considerably less luxurious. Someone once said we all live in cages; some are just bigger than others.

13. When I heard her voice, it sounded right. Somehow the light featheriness of her voice seemed to be exactly how I thought her voice would sound. There was no shock; it wasn't jarring. To have her read it to me was nice. Of course, though, because I grow tired when the voice isn't mine and it's not telling me something new, I didn't listen to the whole story.
14. I've never been particularly good at rereading.
15. You know, it occurs to me now that maybe part of the reason I'm not the best at languages is I can never hear what they're saying. I see their lips move; I feel myself trying to process what they're saying; I only hear the occasional sound. It's the saddest thing.
16. Sometimes when I'm texting people I feel like I'm self-centered. My texts are always longer, like mini novellas, block after block after block. I have a lot to write, I've always been very open when I write.
17. When I first got my period, I wrote it on a piece of paper and gave it to my mother. When I felt like I wasn't being heard, I'd write her a letter.
18. I don't feel self-centered in person. In fact it's quite the opposite. I'm always trying to hide myself, blend in. Maybe it's all in my head.
19. My biggest struggle when I write is both spilling my soul and then not redacting so much that the story disappears. I carry so many personal secrets and burdens that aren't completely mine to tell. How can you reveal your truth when it's so intimately tangled around someone else's? It's not my place to expose them.

20. As I read "Appointment<sup>3</sup>", it sounded like me. I too hadn't left the house in weeks. It sounded so eerily like me I had to check the date. It's a Covid story written March 31,2020. I laughed, a deep belly jiggling, wide grinned, open mouthed laugh.
21. It seems I'm not the only one processing this experience through writing.
22. For a long time I thought I was a natural stoic. I've always been amazing at maintaining a sense of neutrality in all emotions around strangers (admittedly, I'm very emotive with those I'm close to). But now... I think it's important that I come to terms with the fact that burying my emotions and hiding my anxiety (and quite poorly at that) doesn't make me a stoic.
23. Stoicism isn't about being a numbed being, it's about having the discipline to control your emotions instead of letting them control you. This doesn't mean not feeling them, or necessarily denying that you feel them, but it means being able to channel them in positive ways from a position of strength and courage.
24. I live somewhere else. There's a whole other life in my head. A world created, my imaginings. There I am that woman I aspire to be. I have found my husband. I've skipped over the struggle of life and I'm at peace. She has minor problems and she has the power to solve all of them. I envy her sometimes. She has everything I want and she doesn't even know I exist.
25. And to think others have such thoughts too. Reading "On Seeing the 100% Perfect Girl One Beautiful April Morning,<sup>4</sup>" I could feel my heart aching, the tears beginning to take form. My body weightless, my daydreams running wild with the story Murakami wrote. Apparently it's a song. If anyone ever sang that I'd cry. Now I've got that song from

Downton Abbey stuck in my head. If you were the only girl and I were the only boy. God I feel like crying.

26. For someone who's incredibly emotional, why have I idolized stoicism?
27. For someone who spends so much of her time thinking of God, contemplating their existence, conversing with this being which may or may not even be there. If there is a God, I wonder if they even care. Is my presence, my existence, my struggles worthy of their notice, their special interest?
28. Do they care? Do they care? Do they care?
29. I feel like it would be nice to join a religion. The followers seem so secure in life.
30. My first time going back out for something akin to pleasure, it was strange to see how normal some things were. Others were noticeably different; SoHo has never looked so empty.
31. We all need to go to therapy at some point to deal with these lost six months. Half a year, gone, if not more.
32. I think "*Until then, we live*<sup>5</sup>" is my new favorite quote. It might be my new life motto. It's from "Dude, You've Gotta Check Out This Virginia Woolf Chick." The piece became more amazing when I found out it was written by a woman. Why can women write great and realistic male characters, but men seem to fail at the female brain.
33. There's the unspoken idea in society that books with female main characters are inaccessible to the male

audience but if that were truly the case why is it that women do just fine reading books and empathizing with male main characters. Everyone can relate to male Sherlock but make Sherlock a woman and half the world is in uproar. I don't understand it.

34. *If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?*<sup>6</sup>
35. If you take anything away from this book, anything at all, I want you to remember that McSweeney's has been providing daily humor almost every day since 1998. They are quite literally one of my new favorite online publications now. Their humor is biting. I guarantee something on their website will make you smile. All my friends have had enough of me sending them pieces from their website so now I'm contractually obligated to make you go read some. I need to share. I must share.
36. One of my favorites, ironically not McSweeney, has to be "Doppelgänger."<sup>7</sup> I could not believe they made the subway voice sound like an internal monologue, the voice of God but I then realized they weren't too far off. This random voice booms down from the heavens telling me if I'll be blessed or smitten and it cannot be bribed or lulled to pacificity by false promises. It was everywhere and nowhere. Apparently it's a person. A woman, who only took the subway once in 1957, if this story is to be believed. And I believe it, not because it's logical, or inherently believable for a story written in a magazine I just found out about that's existed for only a year longer than I've been alive. But because it's a good story, and sometimes you just want to believe a good story.
37. "Alas, I lacked the will to be born" is such a me line. I could have sworn I wrote it in a text if you didn't tell me it was from a short story. I actually immediately took a pic and sent it to a friend (after writing this sentence of course).

38. Honestly, she was amazingly witty, hilarious, her words spoke to me like all the flash fiction I read before hadn't. She could sit on the shelf with "Bluets" (which I now own two copies of. Thank you Covid).
39. And then I realized it, these were all stories about the train woman, her different lives.
40. The name... right over my head.
41. In this one they meet. They meet and she's stunned to see her doppelgänger but her doppelgänger isn't. We hear the tale of the doppelgänger. I didn't know that apparently one was the copy and the other the real and that the copy had to die.
42. I remember when a man tried to jump off the train.
43. The train seems to attract craziness. Back out in the real world, my first taste of crazy was once again on the train: The Man and The Frying Pan, a novel.
44. This is why I read.
45. My aunt sings unashamedly. Whenever she wants. It made me uncomfortable at first but then I realized she's free in a way I'll never be, no, in a way I'm not yet. I love it now, I like how she's so carefree that she can sing whenever even though her voice is croaky and pitching from note to note, swaying like a drunk woman on a rocky ship. She sings.
46. She sings next to me while she's on her phone in bed.
47. She sings when she's in the shower

48. She sings when she's making tea.
49. If I ever found a church it would be a church for women. Eve wouldn't be punished for not doing anything wrong, Medusa wouldn't be a monster, and Proserpina would be known for more than pomegranates.
50. It's almost as if rule number one for creating a religion is find a woman and make her a scape goat for something bad.
51. I wanted something to eat but I didn't want a meal. We never had chocolate on hand when I wanted it.
52. I've been eating cheese recently, on my naan pizza and in my pasta. I had a chunk once for fun when I was cooking. It tasted all right. Better than I remember cheese tasting. I reached for it in the fridge. The forgotten block already showing a bit of mold in one spot. I carved it off. Saw the perfect health of the creamy yellow and diced it. After two cubes I couldn't stomach anymore. I still don't like cheese like that. Some weeks later I rediscovered the diced pieces I had put in a fresh bag and thrown back in the fridge. They were all hosting a dinner for their new friends, pale green and spotty. I threw the bag out and bought a new block.
53. For at least a week I washed the dishes after midnight. Everything spilled over into the next day. The next day didn't exist until after I woke up. Always on Pacific time. Never allowed to truly adjust to being back.
54. This is when time lulled the most for me. I began to read again.
55. I didn't look at the title, I didn't remember why I had chosen it. I stumbled into the story blind. It was the story of some people in a small remote town who were

suffering from food being stolen by an alleged hermit that no one had ever seen. Man became story, story became myth, myth became legend, and life went on. Until... one day the hermit was caught and when asked why he was out there living on his own he responded, "he simply wanted the freedom to be alone." The line struck with me but it broke the spell. I knew I had to write the words down for this book. I knew it was a moment. It reminds me of the youtuber who was talking about the dark sides of family vlogging. No moment is just a moment anymore. When your life's tied to your work, the experiences aren't yours anymore. I broke the spell to write the spell here and I wish I hadn't. I wonder how the story would have continued differently if I hadn't gone back to the title to mark it down.

56. "She Wants to be Alone"

57. More than anything it has inspired me to live out my hermit dreams. What if instead of going to France I went to the woods instead. Already before the thought has barely been thought I'm thinking of how others would respond. Will I never be able to live out my days in the garden? At the end of the piece, mesmerized, inspired, touched I scrolled to the top to see the title. I was shocked. It was the piece I had been avoiding, leaving open with my many tabs for some time. I could never get myself to read it. Now, it was a call to arms. It stirred my soul my conscious my very being. But to what? To what? Thank you, Rhian Sasseen. It meant a lot. Thank you.

58. We ordered things so rarely almost no one saw me. Home alone all the time, some days I looked more decent than others. I forgot... I forgot that outside eyes aren't so forgiving. I forgot how to dress for outside eyes. One day I ripped my slippers. I answered the door in them. I don't know if they noticed, I never remembered what I was wearing when I went to the door. I remembered the outside. I thought of the shame of ripped slippers and the message it sent. "I don't care." Or worse. I bought new slippers.

59. Self-conscious.
60. Since quarantine began and with nowhere to go and no one to see me 360° I've taken to wearing my hair in braids. They're great for hair healthy, or so I've been told. At first, they were twists. Decent enough but not good or stylish enough I would feel comfortable wearing them outside. Then I transitioned to braids in the same small sections as the twists. Still not outside worthy. I transitioned to bigger braids as quarantine neared an end. My aunt said my hair didn't look done but I liked it. By July my hair was out in it's curls after I hurriedly showered and washed it to go outside. I forgot how my hair looked. I forgot the beauty of having free curls on my head.
61. In "Killers<sup>8</sup>", she tells the story of a life I've never lived, a life I might have wanted to live, I might still do sometimes. To live it once, just for a week, just for a moment long enough to know I can but short enough for it to not be me. But she sounds sad. And I wonder if I would be sad too. She tells me the way I think of love doesn't exist. I believe her but it doesn't make me dream any less. Does that make me stupid or optimistic? Delusional?
62. *After all's said and after all's done,  
What should I be but a harlot and a nun?*  
- The Singing-Woman From The Wood's Edge, by Edna St. Vincent Millay
63. I had joked not long ago that I think I'll start using the royal we but for some reason I had not realized it transferred over in all things because when I watched *Tudors* I was caught off guard by the king's "our" when referring to himself alone. Our mind now understands.
64. Nevertheless, we have mastered the art of waiting a day. My technique is so perfect that I don't notice till the whole day has suddenly been washed down the drain, plucked from right in front of me. I feel like those

suddenly condemned in the Faust stories<sup>9</sup>. They know it's happening but never truly see it coming.

65. Considering the great woman we desire to be speaks 12 languages and has a vast knowledge of music and art and current events, is well-traveled flittering from place to place and yet still grounded enough to perform true lifesaving work that helps a vast number of people, so many people that perhaps a village or a city or a town consider me a patron a watchful ever helping hand, someone to feel immense gratefulness towards but who still remains the humble, in touch philanthropist, who knows how to dance and shimmy and seduce but doesn't need to seduce or particularly tries to with a great library that abuts the garden containing the glass greenhouse that allows me to be both outside and inside and a garden that makes people cry living a life that asks you where is your god because we are here and we seem to be doing it all, you would think we would stop procrastinating and playing Sims and Crusader Kings 2 and getting lost in show after movie after reddit reading YouTube videos. But alas, we had no childhood and we are constantly in search of lost time.

66. All at the expense of a great woman who does not exist yet and might never will.

67. The mind is a funny thing. In problems of Philosophy Russel argues that the sensations of touch, smell and taste create sense data which is real. The realness of the sense data goes to show that something exists there regardless of whether we sense it properly or not. Pluto's cave theory is that all we see are the shadows of what really is because we cannot see the fire or see past the fire to see what causes the shadows we perceive. I had thought to describe a dream belief I had but I see Pluto's cave theory is that belief.

68. What I planned to say is that, I believe the dream belief and the real object belief are existing together. When we dream, we believe the world to be correct and as it

should be because in that dream, the world as is is all we know it to be so flying is not bizarre, swimming without breathing is not bizarre, spontaneous teleporting to different locations is not bizarre. But when we become aware that we are dreaming, we can feel the off-ness of the reality. The current reality we are in is a dream based on a reality we have seen and maybe lived in that is potentially warped because dreams warp things.

69. I either am or I am not. You are or you are not. This is or this is not. I only wish someone would tell me which of the two it is. #where'smyburningbush<sup>10</sup>

70. Perhaps we really killed God.<sup>11</sup>

71. Recently I've begun reading Simone de Beauvoir's *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. Her words speak to me like one kindred spirit to another. Our childhoods were eerily similar if I do say so myself.

72. It was comically reassuring to hear that she struggled with French too. Unfortunately, it looks like once again now is not the time for French.

73. When I was in high school, I took two language. I loved them both, I really did. Latin spoke to my soul. French spoke to the future I wanted to have. In the end I stopped because I realized I was doing them both a disservice. In my haste to "redeem myself and restore my honor," like Zuko, I charged ahead without a plan: my own north pole. I've put myself back in the same position I was in to begin with. I hadn't realized it till I spoke to a friend.

74. I did enjoy my brief summer stint with French before Japanese engulfed it. I honestly thought I was making nice progress. For now I'll just have Simone and Engrenages.

75. There are few material things I have desired as constantly and at different points in my life than a grand piano, a harp and a typewriter and yet I'm constantly surrounded by things I had once desired and now do not turn to. Perhaps I'm too harsh on myself. This isn't entirely true. There are few things I love more than this laptop. As much as I like my phone it could never.
76. The fridge grumbles and complains about being used. It rings out strong and low and clear. One note, in constant vibration. A death chant. It goes on for a few minutes or a few days. Sometimes the sounds die down so long and so completely I forget that it argues and then It starts up and my ears are caught off guard. The rumbling continues They say it's not broken; it's supposedly cooling down. I wish it would cool quietly. This is the ninth circle of hell (in true form I don't even know what the circles are). Perhaps purgatory? Maybe I live with this noise because I've angered God or another celestial being something I do not know and understand outside of myself. Maybe it's a bit self-important to think that I, one of the 7.5 billion human beings, can be so important that I can anger what be.
77. That's not even considering non-human life and the possible other life forms out there in the universe. Multiverse? Wouldn't that be fun. Would we still be under the jurisdiction of one god?
78. A cat, a horse, a garden, books, and a window seat. More things I have desired constantly.
79. And company, I guess. I didn't think I really missed company, but my new friends are YouTube reddit reading channels so clearly I'm compensating. I've never been one to care before but now, I think that's how I get my human interactions. Hours and days of the robot telling me the stories of others. I found a channel the other day that used a real voice and was a real person. I listen to them

endlessly. I listen to "rant" and review videos now. It's almost like they're talking to me.

80. I always thought that if I did become religious, I would be a Buddhist. Recently I've even started contemplating Islam. There's a certain appeal in being able to be covered whenever I'm out in public. A newfound freedom.
81. I'm so naturally drawn to Buddhism. Our life principles align in many ways. Buddhism is also similar to stoicism. Clearly, I have a type.
82. The news is the endless soundtrack of my life. It plays when I go to sleep. It plays when I wake up. Ever present reminding me the world is a scary place. Never anything good.
83. Through writing this I have found Aeon, psyche, McSweeney's and I'm very grateful. Through this work, I've been gifted with the ability to spend time looking for new works, new stories, new essays, and still find and cherish the old. If all else fails and this turns out to be the worst story known to man, in this moment, as I write, and breathe and live and think and type, with the sound of the news discussing Corona in the background this Thursday evening the day after the ides of July, I am content. I've found peace.
84. PS. As a later version of this Kyra, I can with full confidence say, this peace was soon lost. But it was nice while it lasted.
85. This is also your friendly reminder that McSweeney's is amazing and the only lesson you're obligated to learn while reading this book.

86. As I grow older, I feel more and more like Eve. I'm encouraged to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge. The more I consume the more I know, think, feel. The world becomes a murkier place and everything I once held firm and true are now constantly pulled into question. My acquisition of knowledge makes me an outcast to my family who know me as a child. My new ideas are foreign and polluted. I have festered and become the raisin in the sun<sup>12</sup> and somehow, it's both right and wrong. Was I not always meant to one day be a raisin? And yet, I'm treated as if I've committed a crime against humanity by doing what I've always been destined to do.
87. Persecuted.
88. Apples, Raisins, and Pomegranates.<sup>13</sup>
89. Everything looks bigger when you're a child. I can still remember visiting my grandparent's apartment some years ago. My uncle had taken it over once they moved out. It seemed so much smaller than I remembered. But this couldn't be the same place I thought. It was all there, the windows with the bars were as I remembered them, and the bathroom was still the same, but all the space had somehow been sucked out of the place.
90. I didn't look at the hallways and looking back I wished I did. I spent so much time at the windowsill looking out the window and carving lines and shapes into the plaster. It seems weird now that I didn't check to see if it was the same. The lobby is still fresh in my mind.
91. "How can we grasp nature's image and put it on a page?"<sup>14</sup> a line so perfect I wish I had written it. She wrote this about the universe, I intend to mean myself and the world around me. What does that say?

92. Reading in the chair one leg crushing the other. Your foot goes numb and the urge to relieve the pressure compels you to move long before you realize why. A numb tingling spreads from your knees to your toes, a dull thumping, pulsing never sharp or electric just there, a heavy weight ever present. Wiggling your toes accentuates the dullness. Somehow with all this weight on it, it feels empty, separate. Until the blood flows and the nothing leaks out and the leg is yours once again.
93. Russel asks if there is any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it? I answer no. Even if I could believe everything outside of me existed or didn't exist, I can never for certain say that I exist now or in the past or in the future. I'll never know if I'm just a brain in a jar<sup>15</sup> if even that.
94. Everything we directly see and feel is an appearance that hints at a sign of reality. But if reality is hiding behind the veil, how can we know what truly is behind the veil, or if there's even a thing behind the veil to discern?
95. Perhaps I have too great a sense of self-importance. I'm convinced that we are we and that our dreams are ours but who's to say we are just a daydream in Gods mind. Berkeley tells us matter is an idea in God's mind. We might not even be physical beings.
96. My daydreams are always so real and vivid though I lack the ability to conjure images to go with my thoughts. To imagine that we're all simply an idea, a daydream in a god's mind. Truly amazing.
97. No, I've decided the only thing I can be sure of are the things that go on inside my brain that make all else happen and cause the sensation I feel.

98. As I think more on it, naturally Stoicism would be similar to Buddhism. Stoicism was inspired by Pyrrho's writings and Pyrrho accompanied Alexander the Great on his triumphant campaigns through Persia and India. It would make sense that a certain level of idea cross pollination took place.
99. Rupi asks me "what is stronger than the human heart which shatters over and over and still lives" and I say the mind which lets the torment go on telling the heart to keep beating, today is not that day, now is not that time.
100. Her poems I read aloud, barely a sound; you could mistake it for breathing or a silent prayer to god. I could not read as loud as she could sing. When people can hear me, I can't be loud. Always silent. Always a ghost.
101. Perhaps the reason I idealized stoicism so much is because of its ties to Rome. All roads and what not.
102. Of course, its originally Greek but...as we all know, what is truly Roman?
103. For some reason during my freshman year of high school I decided to take a partial vow of silence, that I've never really been able to break. Why did I go silent? It felt like a choice of power when I made it but now, I wonder.
104. I was scared of sounding stupid. When you're silent, people never know what you're thinking but when you speak, people can judge. It's definitely one of the reasons why my foreign language speaking skills are always atrocious.
105. I mean... my English isn't really any better either.
106. As I read "Sweetness", it started to seem like I was reading it from the perspective of my future family

members. As if this is how they would feel when I did what I've wanted to do. What her family did: leave and never look back. Weirdly enough, it made me want to leave home more. I felt bad for this mother, I did, and to an extent I felt sympathy for her. But... somehow it made me want to leave more.

107. There is so much about my family I might never know. We're very good at keeping secrets from one another. I read somewhere once that therapy is for people who had to deal with people who should have gone to therapy but didn't.

108. Do you think people of old were happier living a life of strict religious devotion? Sometimes I think life must have been easier with less decisions to make. The gift and the curse of freedom.

109. As Simone de Beauvoir spoke of playing with her sister, I could only wonder how my life would be if my siblings and I were closer in age. My closest and most constant companion for the 19 years of my life is my beloved cousin and practical older sister who is and always will be 7 years older than me. I'm constantly surprised and very grateful that she puts up with me when I'm aware, if the stories are true, that I was a true ass and spoiled and generally a terror to be around till I was around 5 or 6 if not later.

110. I can't believe I'm 19. Just shocked. Who let me live this long?

111. Nothing reassures a child more or gives them a sense of inflated importance than being an only child and the youngest of the family. With these two identities and the advantage of constantly spending my childhood in the home of one family member or another, I won over their immediate affection, something my siblings will never have. I am quite assured that I am in some ways the center of my family existence and quite literally the only one keeping

us in contact. I'm sure that if my siblings and myself didn't exist, they might not still speak to each other now.

112. Reconciling the identities of only child and oldest sibling along with being the older sister is an interesting conundrum. I've had enough practice and enough years to be fully formed in my ways as an only child, reassured that I would never have a sibling only to suddenly receive one. I'll tell you a secret, but you must promise to tell no one. I only ever wanted my brother. I never anticipated having more siblings than him.

113. To be honest, I still haven't internalized that the world, time, and all that it entails doesn't stop simply because I'm not interacting with it. There's no pause button in real life. Things go on, deteriorate, expire.

114. The thing I feel guiltiest about is spending so much time away from my siblings. I think they'll forget. My greatest fear is they'll forget me.

115. Time is one of the biggest truths of my existence that I keep getting shocked by, like a toddler that hasn't learned object permanence yet.

116. Where did it go? When will it come back? You mean to say it was just behind the blanket? I'm not buying it.

117. My aunt needed me so I was there. I hurriedly grabbed my bag that already had my French study materials and laptop in it. Threw in my Japanese textbooks and then I left. I threw personal care to the wind leaving only armed with myself and a mask.

118. What does that say about me? Suddenly called upon and I make sure to grab my study materials. Am I a realist or

someone who doesn't know how to not force the issue of work?

119. I wasn't wrong tho. It was in my best interest to take them with me in the end.

120. I think I am both things. I am both selfish and selfless. They are not mutually exclusive. The same woman who can be selfish enough to care about her appearance during her aunts emergency trip into the city can also put her life on hold, make the several trips to the store and prepare drinks and clean up for her aunt.

121. I think quarantine might have been detrimental to my process. It's easier to be self-assured on you're on your own. It's harder around strangers. Though I feel as if I am better now than I was before, I feel as if I could have been better still.

122. Am I a woman? I very much decidedly want to be a child with all the benefits of adulthood. Suddenly Britney Spears words come to mind, "I'm not a girl, not yet a woman." The in between are always the hardest, are they not?

123. My aunt and I slept together last night. While a little annoying, it reminds me of my childhood, when I would climb into bed with her. She held my hand as she drifted off to sleep. I missed holding her hand. She is my world. I ... there are too many words that I cannot say and write.

124. It's such a wakeup call to take so long to get through a book I might have once devoured in a less than a week. My skills are lacking. My mind has grown week. Is this normal?

125. I read the whole Hunger Games Trilogy while balancing schoolwork in nine days in middle school and now I'm taking

forever to get through all the books I wanted to read for Appel.

126. I can never truly be an adult, or at least the one I want to be until I remember to actively value peoples plans and schedules more. I should try to stick to my promises of visiting and hanging out more.
127. As I sat there with her finally opening up to me about the secrets of this relationship she hid so well, I felt vindicated? Accepted? I had gained her trust and confidence; the highest form of our relationship and I was happy to achieve it. These glimpses of being taken in as a confidant with her made me feel all the more appreciated and considered more adult. Our relationship, slowly but surely, was changing. I took great care to listen attentively, uhming and shaking my head yes and no for emphasis. I think I uttered all of 5 words. I couldn't say anymore out of fear it would break the spell, drop the veil, and this moment would be ruined.
128. I know certain family secrets are still left buried and perhaps I'll never know them. But in these past months I've learned more about my family than I've ever know these 19 years of my life.
129. I pulled the blanket up around her, put her to bed, walked to the bathroom and I cried on the toilet. Not yet, I cried. Promise me you won't take her. Promise me promise me promise me. Promise me.
130. Rule number one of taking care of a sick person: Never let them see you cry.
131. It's tiring work taking care of her 24/7. My body aches from sleeping on the floor and the sofa. I have to readjust to waking up before 9. It's not a burden though. I

love this woman more than I love almost anyone, maybe even more. I would do anything for her. Helping her, caring for her, I do it out of pure love. There's nothing she could ask for that would be too much. There are things I've already sacrificed without her knowing. I don't think she would want me to but she needs me and I would put her above these fleeting desires. I can always come back to them when this is past, I can't always come back to her.

132. I cannot say the same for others.

133. It's weird to go from my shell, my bubble of safety, never leaving the house, never going into the city to retuning to such an active state of life. I've gone outside almost every day either to the city for doctors' appointments or to the store for preparatory supplies.

134. Today her doctor trusted me to go to the store and pick up vitamins for my aunt with her own money. I love being trusted by strangers. It's such an honor.

135. One time my cousin and I were leaving By Chloe and this couple asked me to take their picture. Out of all the strangers on this New York street they choose me.

136. Another time in Italy this couple asked me to take their picture on Palatine Hill<sup>16</sup>.

137. It's such a position of trust and honor for a stranger to willingly and enthusiastically hand their phone over to you, of all the strangers to pass them. I love it.

138. It's a different experience all together to clean up after a loved one who has soiled themselves and the toilet.

139. Every time I enter the city, I think of how close I am to my friends. How weird it is to be so close, right there, and yet unable to go to them.
140. I wanted to name this between you and me but can you believe that titles been used not one not twice but at least three times. I'm hurt. This is a personal slight.
141. I'm obviously kidding but I still wish there were only one.
142. Funnily enough, I had thought that I was being original giving this title an in-between theme since my forerunner (that I could remember) was behind the yellow door) but from the beginning in the list of title ideas I had written "The in between place" so clearly I had some idea that we would end up here. The foresight on past me is always amazing and appreciated but future me.
143. The Royal we as I use it: what did past me want and plan, what do I want and plan, what will I want and plan. We're inseverable and I always say, for future me whenever I do something excessive. It's like Monk's "You'll thank me later."<sup>17</sup>
144. Can you believe echoes from the past is also taken? A whole historical fiction series. I can't begrudge them. I might even look into it. But again, god, you've blocked me. I've been beaten to the punch.
145. Perhaps I can share
146. I say as if I'm the one deigning to share my title with them and not the other way around. Perhaps I am right, who knows, who will know.

147. The things we forget, the things we carry, and the things we burry.
148. Is that a title I sense? It's a long one, I think not.
149. Here I am in the lion's den. From isolation to Lenox Hill Hospital. I'm even considering sleeping here. I don't want to leave her side and if I could, I would stay the night. Chernobyl<sup>18</sup> seems both closer and farther away. My personal risk now is not nearly as great as hers was. We are not the same and yet we are.
150. Same but different.
151. Perhaps the reason psychopaths exist is because they're more likely to survive. People put themselves in all sorts of danger in the name of love and other emotions. When you feel nothing, it's just easier to survive.
152. Smile and wave.
153. I'm on the bus. By myself going into the city. God help me.
154. I'm on the train.
155. As Simone spoke of no longer believing in God and the silence that now enveloped the world, I realized that I hoped there was a God because otherwise who would I be taking to. I would be talking to myself.

156. Would it be crazier to talk to someone who isn't there with the belief that they were or to talk to someone who isn't there with the belief that they might not be? Honestly, I can already guess which is crazier? I'm insane. Certifiable maybe. I'm ready to go. Zip me up.
157. My chest hurts. I can't breathe. Deep breathes. It'll be over soon.
158. I'm either breathing so hard waiting for this train because my inactivity has actually made me short of breath walking upstairs, I've always been short of breathe and just can't remember that right now, taking the train is giving me major anxiety, or it's hot and I can't breathe through this stupid mask.
159. I'm leaving the hospital and taking the train at the tail end of traditional rush hour. I'm honestly praying everyone is working from home.
160. My new mantra is I hate being an adult; I hate being an adult; I hate being an adult. It literally must be said in groups of threes and I swear if I had a quarter for every time I said that, I might hate being an adult less.
161. *Until then, we live.*
162. And the words blew past us with the thoughts from a time already past, whispering "Suppose..."<sup>19</sup>