Three weeks after her wife died, Donna woke up to find her *Hillary for President* sign ripped from the ground in front of her house and thrown into the woods behind her backyard. It was a week before the election. The leaves on the ground had already passed their mid-October gold and were curling into their early-November umber. She picked the sign up out of the rotting mess and stuck it right back in her front lawn. The next day, it happened again. Donna smoothed the bent sign and wiped the dirt off as best she could before setting it back in its rightful place. Every day for a week, she took that mangled sign out from her forest and stuck it back in the hole in her grass, and the more ripped and wrinkled and muddy that sign became, the more emphatically and proudly Donna displayed it.

“I’m glad Renee is not here to see this,” Donna told me over the phone. “You know Renee. I don’t know what she would’ve done but it would not have been good.” She’s right. Donna’s wife was not the type to stay silent. I can just imagine her in that god-awful stick shift, driving around their neighborhood in New Hampshire and taping pictures of Hillary’s face over every *TRUMP* sign. I see her knock-kneed and laughing, sticking twelve more *Hillary for President* signs in their front lawn and saying something like *Might as well make ‘em work for it.*

On the other end, Donna got quiet. I could almost hear her massaging her temples or twirling her wedding ring around her finger. “This is the first time I’ve ever felt unsafe in this house.” We both listened to each other breathe.

Donna’s house belongs to dream worlds—it is a place built for eccentric old wizards or a band of beavers with eyeglasses and a penchant for hidden libraries. The walls are painted deep reds and blues. There are beads hanging from the ceiling and large plants climbing up walls and taking over windows. There are glass sun-catchers and rainbow lights. Buddhas and sculptures
with trickling water. Sand pendulums. Two wooden footstools shaped like turtles sit in front of a couple of plump, brown, leathery armchairs. The one by the window was Renee’s.

When Renee died, Donna asked us to sit in the places Renee used to sit. She kept seeing her dead wife out of the corner of her eye, sitting with her feet up sipping tea or stroking the cat on her lap. Donna needed us there so she could get the better of her eyes when they played their tricks. So there we were, piled on that armchair—my mom, my two sisters, and I. Donna’s youngest sister and three nieces. She asked if we could still feel Renee in the house. We said of course we could. She asked whether it felt like Renee’s life or her death, and we promised it felt like life. But it felt quiet, somehow emptier than it did before. Vulnerable. I used to think that house could stand up to anything—for heaven’s sake, there’s a Xena Warrior Princess breastplate in the guest room—but now, it worries me to think of it under attack.

Donna really threw herself into politics after Renee died to get herself up and out of bed in the mornings. “I refuse to be as broken as I was after mum,” she announced, sipping on her coffee. She says words like that—“mum.” It’s one of the unexplained quirks of our family. Donna has a thick Boston accent and her three sisters—including my mother—have barely any trace of one. It didn’t come from my grandmother or grandfather either. I had to ask my mom about my grandmother. I was only eight when she passed so I don’t remember her voice anymore.

“I refuse to be as broken as I was after mum,” she said. “I can’t be in that kind of pain again. I don’t think I’d come out of it.” So politics it was. She watches Rachel Maddow every morning while she irons her clothes. There are Hillary magnets all over the fridge and buttons on the coffee table. She has posters and bumper stickers and beer holders that say “Chillary Clinton.”
Donna had met Hillary at a rally the summer before she lost Renee. She’d shaken her hand, looked her in the eye, and said, “My mum would have been so proud of you.” At home for days afterwards, all she could do was talk about the crystal blue eyes of the future female president. She’d open her mouth into a big O, widen her eyes, and make firework sparks with her fingers by her temples. Renee had teased, “I thought my eyes were the most beautiful blue eyes you’d ever seen,” and Donna had said, “Of course they are, honey. She may be the next woman president, but you’re my queen.” I remember that clearly. It pulses through my head sometimes like a song I can’t get rid of: you’re my queen you’re my queen you’re my queen.

After Donna woke up and found Renee dead, the first thing she said to her sisters was “Her eyes weren’t blue anymore. She was blue.”

Donna awoke to the news that Hillary had not been elected President on November 9th. She had been a widow for four weeks. Her Hillary sign was not in the forest. It was standing lopsided and bent in her front yard, untouched for the first time in a week.

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I got on a bus to Raleigh with my friend Mika the day after Trump’s inauguration. I wore my white kimono jacket with the stiff puffy sleeves—a jacket I loved but knew was intensely unattractive—because I figured if there is anywhere to wear whatever you want without judgment, it’s around thousands of women. I’m used to being surrounded by women. My mom was one of four sisters—Donna included—and I am one of three. Before I even took my first breath I was in a world of women, sharing my mother’s uterus with my twin sister. Where I come from, men can only marry in, and most divorce right back out. There are less than a handful left in my entire family, so the fact that there are even fewer on this bus makes my shoulders fall loose.
There’s something otherworldly about a bus full of women wearing pink pussy hats and holding signs saying “Nasty Woman” and “This pussy grabs back!” It was any old, stuffy, gray bus, but when I remember it, I remember seeing stars in daylight. Sitting amongst those women, I felt caterpillars hatch in my stomach and my skin transform into rainbow glitter. I imagined us all simultaneously bursting into some Kumbaya-esque song, unpremeditated, like in *The Sound of Music* when Maria is twirling with her arms spread wide and free and she is so overcome that she *has* to sing, “The hills are alive!” We didn’t sing but we could feel the vibrations of a silent chorus pulsing between us.

When we arrived in Raleigh, a low haze clung to the stone buildings lining the streets. The sky behind them was white—a whiteness so dense and entire I momentarily wondered if it was all there was, if the rest of the universe had disappeared. My eyes began to water. Mika and I broke away from the crowd to find a bathroom, and as we walked along the street dabbing the corners of our eyes, two men stopped us.

“What’s going on?” The one who spoke was leaning against a pole, smoking a cigarette. “What are y’all doing here?” The way he said it sounded less like a question and more like an accusation. His friend was looking at the ground. I was silent and thankful to be on the street with Mika and not alone with the man asking the questions. I’m never good on the spot. He took a puff of his cigarette and blew it at us.

“It’s the Women’s March,” Mika said, in the same way you might tell someone it’s a holiday like Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

He did not look satisfied. “Why.” Again, not a question.

“It’s to send a message to the new administration.” She didn’t go any further. He nodded his head and I wrapped my arm through Mika’s and nudged her down the street.
My father is one of those men. He watches Fox News. He doesn’t think Trump will be that bad for women, for America, or for the world. He didn’t vote for him—or at least won’t admit to voting for him—but I stayed with him in his log house in New Hampshire for a few days in October, and after one of the presidential debates, his whole body shook and he said through gritted teeth, “I will never vote for that woman.” I think my father is misogynistic in the same way my grandfather is misogynistic: not in secret, but in denial. They are men who learned to laugh when their eight-year-old daughters said they wanted to go to college. When I told him I was going to the Women’s March, he changed the subject, and then at the end of our conversation, he threw in: “Be careful on your march, wackos everywhere.”

When we reached the crowd convened at City Plaza, it was only 10:15, so we still had a few minutes of standing before marching. We plopped ourselves next to a four-year old girl, her parents, her aunt, and her aunt’s girlfriend. Are these the wackos my father was talking about? I watch the young aunt playing with her niece. She has piercings all up her ear just like Renee did, and her hair is cropped like Donna’s. She picks up the little girl and sits her on her shoulders so she can see over the crowd. She holds the little hands in her own.

Donna was the first person to hold me when I was born.

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When her mother and father found out she was gay, they made her leave the house. She was twenty-four at the time, and went to live in New Hampshire with her girlfriend, Marty. My grandmother, a soft, warm woman who lived for her children, quickly realized her massive mistake. They made up quickly, but with my grandfather the cracks were harder to repair. He was silent and harsh, a man who had wanted sons and ended up with four daughters. He liked smoking his pipe, playing golf, and sleeping with women who were not my grandmother. When
she was twenty-six, Donna decided to open her own restaurant. She and Marty bought a little
airport diner in Manchester and hired my newly-graduated mom as a waitress. My grandfather is
a stubborn man, but he is also a hungry man. And cheap. Slowly but surely, with the planes
taking off outside the windows, Donna and her father began to mend their relationship with eggs
and pancakes. Meanwhile, Donna became so addicted to cocaine she burned a hole right through
her nose. After a year, she’d stolen $80,000 from the restaurant to pay for the drugs. Marty
walked into their apartment one night to find a line on a mirror on their nightstand, and Donna,
high and guilty, came clean. Marty left. Donna showed up at her parents’ house, broke and going
through withdrawals, and her father answered the door. “I knew you’d amount to nothing,” he
said, and then let her in.

* * *

“Patriarchy is for dicks.” The gray-haired woman holding this sign is wearing a hot pink
pussy hat and complementary bubble-gum-pink fanny pack, and is escorting her young grandson.
He can’t be more than four, all plump and precious in his “feminist in training” t-shirt. He keeps
saying “Let’s goooo!” and kind of bobbing up and down. Sometimes it sounds like he is fired
up and other times it sounds like he is just plain ready to start walking.

Mika looks at me and mumbles, “I feel you, kid.” We’re supposed to take off from City
Plaza around 10:30, but by 11:00 we still haven’t moved, and as each minute passes more and
more toes start tapping. We’re crowded together so tightly we can’t move, but every now and
then the energy from our toes electrifies and moves like a wave up our calves, through our hips
and our chests to our shoulders, lifting our arms up to the sky. It shoots out of our fingertips as
we throw our screaming heads back and thrust our signs high.

“Proud Mama by CHOICE!”
“We will not be silenced!”

“Indivisible with liberty and justice AND HEALTH CARE for all!”

From where I’m standing, the signs piled against the white sky make a ransom note, each sign taking the place of a different cut-out letter. A woman dancing in full orange is holding a sign made out of Cheetos that says “Not My Cheeto!” Right next to her is a man wearing a dark brown hoodie and holding a large white sign that simply says, “Yikes!” Then there’s the guy with “We shall over comb” scribbled on a piece of cardboard and the woman with the elaborate painting of Trump wearing a Jason mask—“Friday the 20th.” A chill sweeps between our bodies and makes us feel so powerful and ominous we giggle. I look at the aunt standing beside me, her young niece still sitting on her shoulders, playing with her graying hair. When I was little, Donna used to let me play hairdresser, too. She’d come over to babysit and my two sisters and I would jump and climb all over her, heart-shaped purple barrettes and sparkly headbands crammed between our fingers. When we were done, we’d hand her a mirror so she could see our handiwork. I’d look over her shoulder to see her thoughts, and she’d catch my eye in the mirror and smile. “Beautiful,” she’d say. Donna is graying now too, the same silvery gray her mother had before the chemo took it all away. Sometimes, when the sun is just right, Donna’s hair sparkles.

“She’s beautiful,” I say, nodding up at the young girl.

The aunt smiles. “Eh, she’s alright,” she jokes. We start talking about the march and I find out she is a teacher worrying about what will happen to public schools under Betsy DeVos. I tell her I come from a family of teachers—my twin sister is currently getting her teacher licensure and teaching kindergarten, my grandmother was a 7th grade English teacher, and my grandfather was a middle school principal….
“They shouldn’t be allowed to teach our children.” It was a big news story in Billerica, Massachusetts. One of the high school teachers in my grandfather’s district had come out as a gay man, to a great amount of backlash from the community. It was the 80s. The police were still bursting into gay bars at night, turning on the lights, cutting off the music, and walking around, batons in hand. They didn’t give a reason and didn’t have to. Intimidation is a weak and base tool, but it works.

“Dad, I’m one of them. You don’t think I should be allowed to teach children?”

My grandfather was quiet for a moment. “I’m not talking about you. You’re different.”

“I’m not,” she’d said.

When Donna tells me about this conversation, I can tell she’s still frustrated thinking about it. We’re sitting on my mom’s couch in California. It’s New Year’s day. This New Year’s would have been Donna and Renee’s seven-year wedding anniversary, and Donna couldn’t stand the thought of being alone, so she booked a flight to us. They’d been together twenty years, but only married for six—they rushed to the court house the very first day they could legally get married in New Hampshire (it became, in 2010, the fifth state to legally sanction same-sex marriage). We’ve been sitting on the couch for hours, Donna and I, and what started as a conversation about (of course) politics slowly turned into stories of Donna’s life. She tells me after the restaurant debacle, she went to work in a warehouse. She liked the work and she was good at it, too, but all of the men she was working with were promoted. She was not. Whenever one of the men in the warehouse was promoted, Donna’s boss would have her train them for the higher position. Finally, one day, she asked the obvious question: “Why don’t you promote me?”
He was stunned, so stunned he scoffed. “You can’t be in charge,” he spit out. “You’re a woman.”

Donna quit on the spot. When she told Human Resources what happened, they said they were going to fire him, but they didn’t. They moved him to a different position in a different office. Some of her old coworkers even thought he’d been promoted.

While she’s telling me this story, I can’t help but look at the lines on her face, concentrated at the corners of her eyes and her mouth. Laugh lines. I can’t believe she’s almost sixty. Donna went back to college in her early forties, almost twenty years ago. She is now a project manager—often the only woman in rooms full of men. She tells groups of male engineers what to do, and lo and behold, they listen. In fact, they adore her. Whenever she is transferred to a new group, the men cry and beg to keep her. She’s in charge, but more than that she is fair and wise and playful and bright and everything I could ever hope to be.

* * *

“Show me what democracy looks like! This is what democracy looks like!” Chants never seem to fit in my mouth—especially call-and-response chants. They remind me that I never went to any pep rallies and was never destined to be a cheerleader. And yet, here I am, screaming chants that I don’t even think are clever or accurate. “Show me what democracy looks like! This is what democracy looks like!” Well, screaming may be a bit of an overstatement, but I’m definitely speaking in rhythm. Then, a woman next to me starts chanting, “We’re here! It’s clear! We’re not going shopping!” It catches quickly and spreads, as Donna would say, “like buttah.” I ask her how she came up with it, and she tells me she went to a Gay Pride Parade where they shouted, “We’re here, we’re queer, we’re not going shopping” to comment on the commercialization of the parade by corporations trying to profit off of the cause. Of course, this
time the chant is more literal—we are a bunch of women on a street walking right past a bunch of boutiques. It is clear we aren’t going shopping. Mika and I look at each other and feel a tickling in our stomachs. Pretty soon it’s found its way to our throats and we’re cackling and unable to chant at all. We laugh so hard we have to stop marching. We laugh so hard we cry.

I’ve been told we keep our memories in our hips and our shoulders, that we walk with them. I can feel Donna in mine. She’s in the crooked spine keeping my head high and my wide, strong hips. My body learns itself from her, finds itself through her. She moves me forward. As I walk the path back to the bus once the march is over, I hug my arms around myself and think thank you. Later, when I get home, I send Donna a picture of myself in that white kimono jacket, holding my sign: “We all move forward when we recognize how resilient and striking the women around us are.”

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My grandfather has been going to Donna’s house regularly. They didn’t talk for ten years—a silence they needed after decades of not hearing what the other said and not saying what the other wanted to hear. Then one day, just six months before Renee passed, they started talking again. It just felt like time. The first time he went to her house after Renee died, he brought a measuring tape. He measured the lengths of her walls so he could make baseboards for them. In his younger years—years when he smelled purely of sawdust and pipe tobacco—my grandfather had built five houses from the ground up. Since he was a principal, he had summers free, so he’d gather a bunch of the male teachers from his school and they’d use their three months off to build a house. He used to have a woodshop in his garage where he’d make dressers and beds and tables and nightstands, and he’d give them all to his daughters. He hadn’t built anything in years, but after Renee died, he went to Donna’s house with the measuring tape.
It was during one of those trips to Donna’s that my grandfather found out about Donna’s mangled sign. He was angry. So angry, in fact, he got up and walked around on his bad knees. He asked who she thought it was, but Donna wasn’t sure. All she knew was that her neighbor, an elderly man with a little dog, had yelled at Renee once while he was walking his dogs past their driveway and she was getting in her car.

“You Democrats,” he’d said, pointing to the three Hillary bumper stickers and two HRC bumper stickers on Donna’s big red Rav4. “You have to rub your beliefs in our faces.”

Renee had been livid—almost as livid as my grandfather was to learn that his daughter’s wife had been yelled at by some Republican mere weeks before her heart suddenly stopped. The next time he went to Donna’s, he wore a *Hillary for President* shirt over his bulbous tummy.

Lucky for him, Donna’s neighbor was sitting on his porch next door. My grandfather decided to pay him a little visit.

“She lost her friend,” he said. Eighty-four years old and my grandfather still was not comfortable calling Renee her wife. “You be nice to her. She lost her friend and she’s really sad. I don’t want to hear about you again.” He wagged his finger at the man like he was a little boy who’d hit an ice cream cone out of Donna’s hand and deserved to be put in the corner.

Donna smiled as she watched the two old, bald men in dentures squabbling in the driveway from inside her dream-world house, now packed away in cardboard boxes. She’s having major construction done, trying to rebuild her house into a home where she can only feel Renee’s life and not her death, a home where she doesn’t feel so alone. She’s tearing down her blue and red walls and rebuilding them in new places. Eventually she’ll unpack all of the boxes again. It won’t feel the same, but maybe it doesn’t have to.