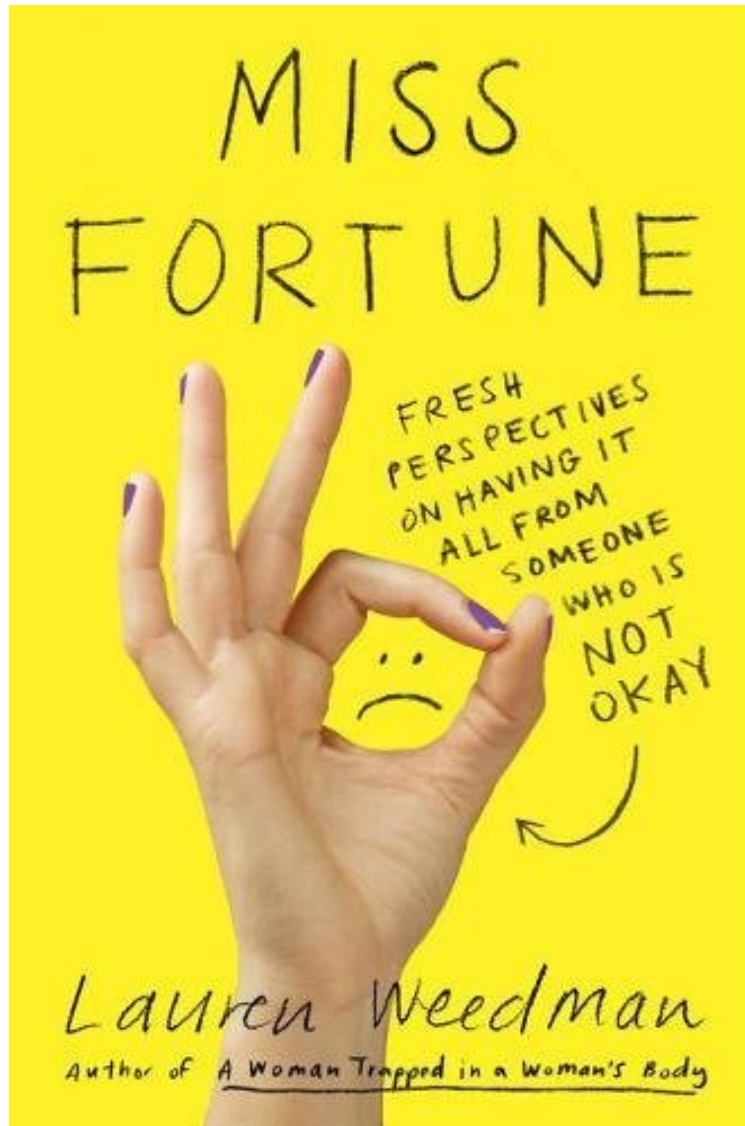


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Miss Fortune: Fresh Perspectives on Having It All from Someone Who Is Not Okay

Lauren Weedman

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#619979 in Books Weedman Lauren 2016-03-15 2016-03-15 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.00 x .60 x 5.50l, .50 #File Name: 0142180238304 pages Miss Fortune Fresh Perspectives on Having It All from Someone Who Is Not Okay | File size: 26.Mb

Lauren Weedman : Miss Fortune: Fresh Perspectives on Having It All from Someone Who Is Not Okay before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Miss Fortune: Fresh Perspectives on Having It All from Someone Who Is Not Okay:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. You'll laugh, you'll gasp, you'll cringe and love every minute of

it. By William C. Funny and real and heartbreaking. A woman writing about a real life with all the ups, downs, wounds and crazy people. There aren't that many books that can really hit me, but this one did. I laughed out loud, cringed, gasped and had to put it down sometimes to just let what I'd read bake in my brain and gut. Just as good as her previous book, "A Woman Trapped in a Woman's Body", so get that one, too. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Thoughtful, Funny, Fresh, Raw, and Emotionally Honest By M Vire Lauren Weedman is funny, and if you enjoyed her last book, A Woman Trapped in a Woman's Body, you really won't want to miss this one. I agree with those who compare her to David Sedaris. I'm a huge Sedaris fan, and she is a similar talent. To me, Weedman's stories feel a bit darker than his. Miss Fortune is a collection of autobiographical stories/essays, all of them highly personal. It's like she's inviting you inside her head, and her willingness to expose her humanity, her vulnerability, her mistakes is beautiful. I read this on a plane, and I was sorry when we touched down because I had to stop for a while--I'd gotten so absorbed. If you're looking for something thoughtful, funny, fresh, raw, and emotionally honest, give this a read. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Quick, Funny Read By Kelly I. Noga Lauren is a talented story teller. I laughed, cringed, felt sad and relieved knowing she was and would be okay. I thank her for being brave enough to share her personal stories. This is a book I could not put the book down.

Los Angeles Times Bestseller For fans of Jenny Lawson, Sarah Colonna, and Lena Dunham, an acutely-observed and hilarious take on what happens when life doesn't end up quite as you'd expected. "Gloriously smart, deeply funny, and nakedly vulnerable ... I laughed. I cried. I thanked my lucky stars I didn't ever have a threesome with co-workers in the Netherlands. But most of all, I fell in love with Lauren Weedman and the raw and complicated truths she so honestly explores on every page." —Cheryl Strayed, author of the New York Times bestseller Wild Lauren Weedman is not okay. She's living what should be the good life in sunny Los Angeles. After a gig as a correspondent on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, she scored parts in blockbuster movies, which led to memorable recurring roles on HBO's Hung and Looking. She had a loving husband and an adorable baby boy. In these comedic essays, Weedman turns a piercingly observant, darkly funny lens on the ways her life is actually Not Okay. She tells the story of her husband's affair with their babysitter, her first and only threesome, a tattoo gone horribly awry, and how the birth of her son caused mama drama with her own mother and birth mother, all with laugh-out-loud wit and a powerful undercurrent of vulnerability that pulls off a stunning balance between comedy and tragedy.

Los Angeles Times bestseller "A mix of humor and humanity."—The Oregonian "I found myself not merely smiling, but cackling — and, in turn, tearing up or sighing with sad recognition... Weedman is skilled at using humor as a way in rather than a diversion. Even and especially at her most hilarious, she's willing to reveal her earnest underbelly."—Los Angeles of Books "Lauren Weedman's Miss Fortune is like a pearl that washed up on a beach full of seaweed, tar balls and plastic six-pack holders. It's a jewel sparkling amid a landscape of literary pollution."—LA Weekly "Miss Fortune is so gloriously smart, deeply funny, and nakedly vulnerable, I missed it after I finished the last page the way one misses the best friend you ever had after she goes away. Lauren Weedman tells her sexiest, saddest, strangest, sweetest stories with a thrillingly unabashed voice that's as charming as it is insightful. I laughed. I cried. I thanked my lucky stars I didn't ever have a threesome with co-workers in the Netherlands. But most of all, I fell in love with Lauren Weedman and the raw and complicated truths she so honestly explores on every page of this absorbing book." —Cheryl Strayed, New York Times bestselling author of Wild "Weedman's charm and self-deprecating humor easily draw the reader in, and her willingness to tangle with hard truths make this a deeply affecting account of salvaging a life from wreckage."—Publisher's Weekly "An intelligent, hilarious, and bittersweet collection."—Kirkus About the Author Lauren Weedman is an award-winning comedic actress, playwright and author. Her television credits include The Daily Show, True Blood, United States of Tara, Reno 911, Curb Your Enthusiasm, New Girl, Arrested Development, Horny Patty on HBO's HUNG and Doris on HBO's Looking. Film credits include Imagine That, Date Night and Judd Apatow's A Five Year Engagement. Weedman's first book, A Woman Trapped in a Woman's Body: Tales from a Life of Cringe, was named by Kirkus as a top ten Indie book for 2007. Weedman lives in Santa Monica and is the host of the popular Moth Storytelling series in LA. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. ***This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof*** Copyright ©2016 Lauren Weedman Love of My Life My boyfriend, David, is organizing his sock drawer when I say to him, "You know, it just hit me: If we end up staying together, you will go down in history as the love of my life." I lean back and position myself on the bed—fan out my skirt and fluff my hair—so that when he turns around and says it back to me, I'll look worthy. But he doesn't follow the script. Instead, he says, "Aww," like he just saw a little baby with hearing aids. We've been together for four years. It shouldn't feel like I just took a gigantic risk and told him that I had a crush on him. We are at the point in the relationship where we are supposed to say either "You are the love of my life too!" or "You are not the love of my life but you have helped me figure out that I don't like bossy women." Lately, David's been bizarrely excited about how his senses are starting to fail. He likes to demonstrate this like it's a magic trick. "Do you see this lemon? Okay . . . I'm bringing it to my nose . . . and [sniff, sniff] nothing! I smell nothing!" I wonder if he's losing his hearing as well as his sense of smell and maybe didn't hear me properly. "That kind of blows my mind to think that you are the love of my

life,” I try, a little louder. I’m fairly certain he hears me because he stops balling up his socks, and it looks like he’s just staring at the wall. All I wanted was for him to simply cup my face in his hands and sob, “You are the love of my life.” I thought it would be a nice midday perk. I almost feel a little cruel. Like I’ve thrown the “you’re the love of my life” ball to the kid with no arms and watched it bounce off his head. True, I was probably fishing for a little reassurance since that evening we were going to dinner with Jessica, an old friend of David’s whom I find completely petrifying. Not only because she’s a yoga/healer person for whom David always makes time for long walks when we visit her hometown of Seattle, but because she used to do massage on Hannah, David’s wife, before Hannah died of cancer eight years ago. Thanks to David’s habit of confusing the speaker for the volume button on his cell phone and having entire conversations holding his phone to his ear and oblivious to the fact that everyone can hear every word, I was able to get a sense of David and Jessica’s relationship without having ever met her. I, along with every- one in line at Subway sandwich shop, heard her telling David, “I miss her hair, don’t you?” For half a second I thought, she’s never even seen my hair. Then I realized what they were talking about, and I knew why I’d never be invited on one of their walks. Jessica is in town for an acupuncture conference and we are going out for Indian food. I’m not so hungry. It doesn’t feel like something I should be going to, but David insists. We all meet in the parking lot of the restaurant and walk toward each other, David’s and Jessica’s arms stretched out in front of them ready to embrace. I encourage David to “run to her!” He laughs, somewhat nervously, which is good, because when Jessica walks up she sees the two of us laughing together. You see Jessica, I make him laugh. I’m good for him. Jessica is attractive. She’s not what a girlfriend wants to see when she’s feeling a little jealous. If she was a real nurturer type, like David says, she would have taken care of my fragile feelings and been a stout, ruddy tree dweller wearing fanny packs full of essential oils, and with thick black hair covering her arms and legs. In reality, Jessica is a tiny blond girl wearing tan parachute pants and a sleeveless David Bowie T-shirt. She’s got that healthy shine that could only come from two-hour headstands and a strict yet “thoughtful” diet of deep breathing and sprouted nut butter. All of Hannah and David’s friends are so attractive. Why is that? Do attractive people hang out with other attractive people so they don’t have to feel bad about never paying for drinks or newspapers? I’m tempted to reach out and touch her skin to see if it’s as soft as it looks, but my fingers are sticky from the gum I took out of my mouth in the car and am still holding until I can find a trash can. David introduces me to Jessica. Jessica stares at me with big startled blue eyes. She looks freaked-out. I’m not sure why. Is it because she was close to Hannah and now she’s being forced to move on? Forced to let go of Hannah even more? Another step in the grief process would be seeing the person’s partner move on. That’s got to be hard. Her stunned gaze is making me uncomfortable. I break the silence: “I need a trash can.” My voice sounds like Godzilla’s foot- steps. Jessica reaches out her hand and offers to take my gum. I give it to her. I thought it would be funny. It wasn’t. It was like a child handing her gum to an adult. The naan hasn’t even hit the table and Jessica is reaching over and giving David little massage-y squeezes. “Oh, hey,” she says. “Thank you for visiting me in my dream the other night! It was a really fun place to see you. The only tough part was waking up!” Did she miss the part where David introduced me as his girlfriend? Am I so far from the type of woman that she imagined David being with that she’s making a move on him right in front of me? I’m sure David must be as irritated by her New Age hooker talk as—“Wow! That’s so cool,” he jumps right in. “I wonder if your dream happened while I was meditating, because I can go to some pretty deep places. Wouldn’t that be wild?” David is the most stressed-out meditator I’ve ever seen. The very first time I saw him “meditating” I thought he had a migraine and was rocking back and forth to help the nausea pass. If he’s in the middle of his daily twenty minutes of “getting right with the universe” and hears me in the kitchen, he’ll call out, “Are you making popcorn?” But he keeps his eyes closed and yells in a whisper voice, so he still counts it as meditation. He always seems tenser after meditating. Like meditation is just uninterrupted time to go over whom he’s angry with. His eyes pop open when he’s done and he’ll be right back in the middle of a fight he started in his head—“Yes, I did tell you that I was selling that bookcase on eBay—I know I did!” “Go back in,” I always tell him. “I don’t think it took.” But at the mere mention of the word “meditation,” Jessica scoots her chair closer to David and asks him, “How are you . . . David? I mean, how are you?” David is handsome and charming; that’s how he is. I’m glad to see he’s enjoying himself. He gives me a quick glance before he launches into his graphic response. Remember I’m at the table, David. Remember I’m at the table. “Well, I had a little blood in the stool.” Oh no, he didn’t. Oh my god. Blood in the stool is like a mating call for yoga people, and Jessica’s chakras just swelled up and released an egg. “Oh, David! David! The rectum is a warehouse for unresolved emotions . . . like grief.” I have to break this up. “You know, he’s fine. He got scraped by an angry peanut or something—he’s really fine.” Which was true. His doctor had confirmed that the source of the injury was the bucket of peanut brittle my parents sent him for his birthday that he finished off in two days. But for some reason David has forgotten this. Jessica puts a protective arm around David as she explains to me how “David had a scare. It’s really scary.” I didn’t throw my three-year-old into the deep end to teach him how to swim. I was simply ribbing David a bit for bringing up anal bleeding in a fine dining establishment. That’s all. Leaving the restaurant, Jessica tells David how much she’d love to be able to do some “work” on him. “It would be pretty intense, but if you trust me . . .” Back at home, I vow not to say anything negative about the night. The two of them have a connection that cannot be denied. Perhaps it’s slipped into a sexual realm. These things happen. Sure, it would be nice if David admitted that Jessica is in love with him, but it’s not necessary.

Jessica looked at me like she loved me a few times.. And her menu. It's what healer folks are trained to do. I'm going to say nothing. Whatever I say is going to make me sound jealous. That's not the person I want to be. It's so unattractive. One little tap of the jealousy wand and poof—you're a tiny mean troll with brown teeth. The best thing for me to do is to pretend I'm not jealous. David is brushing his teeth. "Jessica is the most incredible person I've ever met," I say. I'm already going too far. "She's amazing. I love her." I'm laughing as I talk, like a manic teenage girl. "David, I'm not kidding. I think I'm a little in love with her!" Next thing I know, I'm begging David to tell me how soft her skin is and celebrating that I've finally found the love of my life, and the aggression is back in my voice. This always happens. If I'm not honest about what I'm feeling, the truth finds its own little path to get out. My mother lied about loving her kids more than her cats and now she's a tiny eighty-year-old woman with the face of a giant Persian cat. Better to be myself and overtly make fun of her. Half an hour of taint massage jokes and imitations of her chewing or as she called it "exposing her food to her saliva," later, David informs me that Jessica is a mock-free zone. Got it. Her and 9/11. Not being able to make jokes frees my head up, which is unfortunate because I get hit by a huge realization that I don't want to have: It's not Jessica I'm jealous of. It's far more vulgar. It's Hannah. David can't tell me I'm the love of his life because I'm not the love of his life. Of course I'm not. Hannah, his wife for thirteen years and mother of his first child, is the love of his life. In fact, even if they ever discussed David "moving on" after she died, I would hope he told her, "I will try to be happy for my sake and for our son Jack's sake. But you will always be the love of my life. No matter what." Two weeks later, David and I are on the bluff overlooking the ocean by our Santa Monica apartment. I'm leaving in the morning to do a play in Pittsburgh for six weeks, and I'm in a horrible mood. This morning, I'd decided that before I left I wanted to give Jack, David's son, his first driving lesson. Committing to teaching Jack to drive meant that if something happened, like, oh, David and I broke up before I got back, he and I would still have our thing. Plus, David didn't want me to teach Jack to drive. He felt that he was a young fifteen and not ready. I thought doing it anyway would show Jack that I was a cool girlfriend whom he could trust to be on his side and it would prove to him that like a cool teenager I rebelled against authority. No matter what happened with David, I wanted Jack and me to have a relationship. Of course I couldn't replace his mother, but maybe I'd end up being the one adult in his life who tried the hardest to be there for him in a non-mother-y yet mother-wannabe way. You can't be a part of a kid's childhood for any extended period of time and not feel some sort of investment. Well, you could, but it would take a deep commitment to alcoholism and other modes of forgetting. Jack and I have developed a "just a couple of bros hanging in an apartment drinking fizzy water making fun of the other guy who lives here" dynamic. My attempts to learn about his life are answered with "your face." Examples: "Do you think you'll try out for baseball?" "Your face will try out for baseball." "Does Jaxon have a girlfriend now?" "Your face has a girlfriend now." It's your standard teenage response, which I happen to find hilarious. "Jack, did you drop this sock?" "Your face dropped that sock." My face doesn't have hands; get it? I wish Jack was able to relax more around me, but I get it. The first year of college I was so freaked by having a roommate that I didn't fully breathe or poop for the entire first month. David thinks that Jack and I are alike, and we are, in that we both love to laugh at. It's nice to have that connection, even if it's more of a laughing at than a laughing with. David feels things far "Literally losing his mind from lack of sleep. Literally." The other night, David was doubled over, clutching his stomach, yelling, "Oh my god! Oh my god!" holding on to the stove for support as he made his way to a box of cereal. Jack and I laughed for days about that. We still take turns trying to fake the other one out. At any point in the day, one of us will cry out in pain, fall on the floor, and as soon as we've caught the other one's attention, pop back up and say, "Whew! Hungry." The lesson had taken place on a very wide residential street in our neighborhood. For thirty minutes, I'd covered the basics: driving in a straight line and slamming on the brakes when I yelled, "NOW! NOW! MOTHERFUCKER! NOW!" Maybe it was my stress over leaving, or the fear of Jack hitting the gas pedal instead of the brake and slamming into a palm tree, but I wanted to tell Jack how deeply I cared about him. How after four years together, it wasn't just his dad I had a connection to; it was him. I wanted to tell him the story about working with his mother's best friend, Nina, on a comedy show in Seattle. About how Nina would give all the writers updates on how Hannah was doing after she got sick. About the day she came into the middle of a pitch session, her eyes puffy and red, and told us how Hannah had accepted the fact that she was going to die but what she couldn't accept was the fact that she was going to leave Jack and David. It had been established early on that any talk of Hannah in front of Jack that was not initiated by him was forbidden. I told him anyway. When I got to the end—"and, Jack, at that moment, I can remember so vividly, even though I'd never met you guys, thinking 'Give them to me, Hannah. I'll take care of them,'" Jack didn't move. He sat staring out the window. A teenage warrior face, blank of emotion. "Maybe that wasn't a great story for you to hear," I finally said. I was so desperate to know what he was thinking I considered offering him fifty dollars if he told me how hearing that story made him feel. Before I had the chance to negotiate a deal, he got out of the car and waited for me to turn the car around so he could drive it back down the street. The quiet in the car for the rest of the lesson was very loud. On the bluff, I'm worrying that I've ruined my relationship with Jack and probably with David. I realize I will never be a "wife" or a "mother" to them because those titles have already been taken. Here's what's going to happen: I'm going to go do a show in a new town—be a big hit, feel like a big star, and ride that confidence into the courage to be on my own again. I'll use the money I earn to move

out. It's all too hard. Who knew that being part of a family would matter to me so much? During Joe Biden's inauguration speech he spoke about how after he lost his first wife in a car accident he'd gone through hell but was able to love again, and when he brought home his next wife he said in his direct "everyone calls me Joe" style, "Boys, you see this woman? I love her. She's my wife now and your stepmother. That's how this is going down. We're a family now. Boom." Boom. And they were. Because he said it. Boom. This was not something I could ever imagine David doing. The only thing he had in common with Joe Biden was his hairstyle. Of course, maybe I didn't warrant that kind of statement. Maybe Mrs. B. was such a great lady it brought it out in him. David doesn't seem to be making any effort to make our last day romantic. He's lying on his back shoving salami in his mouth. "Jesus, the ocean bugs me. It's so endless," I say. David's eyes are closed and he says nothing . . . to me anyway. In his head I'm fairly sure he's saying, "Don't worry, Hannah. She's almost gone." My first night in Pittsburgh, I listen to a girl sobbing in her car. The only words I can make out are "noooo" and "whyyyyyy?" It's been going on for so long I've started to sing along with her like you do with a car alarm that's been going off for a long time. "Nooooooo . . . whyyyyyy?" There is also the occasional sound of throwing up and beer bottles being thrown. By the time it starts to get light out, I'm in bed thinking, forget this "love of my life" shit. I just want a warm body next to me. Staying in bed and eating the smooshed power bars I brought with me sounds good, but I think about how David would have us up and out the door looking for a little Pittsburgh joint to have some breakfast. In his honor, I set out, forgetting the most important rule of exploring a new neighborhood—stay away from the streets that are littered with beer cans, crusty throw up, condoms, and dead baby birds. I see two dead baby birds, which seems like one too many. It's the "morning after" on Carson Street, the city's biggest party stop. The only "joint" that is open is Schultz's market. When I walk in, I suddenly miss the dead birds and dried throw up. The market is what my friend Narver would call "an ice cream and porno store." I don't see any porno—but I feel it. Later, the people at the theater tell me, "Oh, don't buy anything from Schultz's. They make their own meat." After five weeks, I'm finding being in this city tougher than I'd imagined. David and I talk on the phone every day but don't say much. Performing eight times a week for audiences that are shuttled in from their convalescent homes hasn't quite been the diva-making machine that I'd hoped. During my curtain calls, I start mouthing "I'm sorry" as I bow to an audience of confused-looking old people. I've gone from deeply depressed to morbidly depressed. After shows I start making videos of myself where I look in the camera and say, "I'm so lonely. I've never been so lonely in my life." They're just three-second videos of me staring into the camera—"I'm so lonely"—looking around the room for someone to talk to, and shutting it off. Gradually the videos get longer as I add a second on each night: "I'm so lonely . . . I want a dog." In my thirst for knowledge, also known as filling up the endless eternity of my days, I was on Huffington Post reading about a woman who'd found a slug in the bottom of her juice carton when I noticed about an article about Joe Biden. The article talked about Joe Biden's second marriage and how nervous he'd been to introduce Jill to his kids. It was the exact opposite of what I'd remembered him saying in his inauguration speech. According to the article, he hadn't pushed Jill at his sons, with some "This is my new wife, call her Momma!" demand. In fact, it was the opposite; he'd waited months before introducing her to his sons and worried constantly about bringing her into their lives too soon. Why was my memory so off? How was it that I remembered what he'd said being so completely different? I must have stopped listening right after he said they'd gotten married and shut the curtains on reality and spun off into my own "Everybody gets married and has a family except for me" storyline. It makes no sense, though, because I don't want to get married. Only weak girls who want to feel "loved" and "safe" need that ceremony of lies. Not me. I don't need that. I'm NEEDless. It's one of my selling points right before beat boxing and speaking Dutch. The article also mentioned how Jill had slowly carved out a relationship with his sons, cooking them meals, driving them to their sports games. She earned her position as a family member. You couldn't really say I'd earned it. The same couldn't really be said about me. I'd taught Jack how to drive to one end of an empty street. It's closing night. The show is sold-out—most of the tickets were bought by one woman bringing a large group. Hopefully, she's one of the wealthy Pittsburgh patrons of the arts I've been hearing so much about. Perhaps she's looking to produce a show in New York to impress all her friends. You never know. Plus, the theater is having a closing-night shindig for me, so people will at least pretend to love me for the sake of a good farewell party. The patron of the arts turns out to be a twenty-four-year-old who brings twelve of her closest drinking buddies for a bachelorette party. Apparently, she thought the show, *Bust*, would be a madcap comedy about boobs. It's actually about my experience volunteering with women at the Los Angeles county jail. The bachelorette crew has clearly been out drinking on Carson Street since eleven a.m. They sit in the middle of the theater and spin their lit-up whips and yell "who-hoo" whenever they think the show has gotten remotely sexual. A character in the play who's been arrested for prostitution reveals that she'd been molested, and there are "who-hoos" and twirling whips lighting up the audience. The prostitute character gets released from jail, I hear one of them drunkenly whisper, "This isn't like ha-ha funny. I have to pee." They all click their way out on high heels and take a group of men from the front row with them. One of those girls is about to be married. She's the love of somebody's life. Chances are, by the time you meet anyone at any time, they have already had a love of their life. You will never be their first love. Nor do you have to be. That's the problem with the "love of my life" thing. I'd never thought I was worthy of it. I do not expect to be someone's anything. I'm the funniest person in some of my friends' lives; there are definitely people I know who can claim me as the

only person they know who took a shit in their own hand. So I'm not without note. Not without some stature. But love of a life? No. "Loves of lives" are a type. They're quiet. Mysterious and unattainable. I'm done with this love thing. I'm into like. "You're the thirtieth like of my life." Who needs more? If you're the love of a life, all you can do is go down, be demoted. Being the thirtieth like of a life means you can go up the list. "After you picked me up from the airport you became the twenty-second like of my life." In the dressing room after the show, the house manager apologizes for letting in a group of drunk women. "You know, when I saw that one girl sucking on that penis straw, I thought, uh-oh." My phone rings. It's David. "Something horrible has happened. Oh my god, Lauren. I'm not even sure how I'm supposed to tell you this." He sounds completely hysterical. My first guess is that he left the clothes in the dryer. Or that he lost his water bottle. "Jack crashed your car," he says. "He stole it and he totaled it. Oh my god, I can't handle this. I honestly can't handle this . . ." The words "crash" and "Jack" stun me. Take me back to misunderstood molestation and penis straws. Tragedy. This could be a tragedy and I'm with David, I can't handle it. Jack cannot be hurt. I cannot live with that. I can't take to think of him in pain. Not pretend hurt like David when he's hungry for breakfast but actual pain. Thank you, Jesus, Paul, and Mary, and the Mamas the Papas, he's okay. Here's the story. David was out of town for a few days working in Seattle. Jack's grandma came to stay with him. Her flight left at four p.m. to go back home and David's flight was arriving at five p.m. Jack was alone for two hours. During those two hours, he invited his friends over, took my keys, and pulled out into traffic. Cops immediately identified teenagers behind the wheel and turned on their lights and came up behind them. Jack saw the cops and took off. As if he was going to lose them. As if he knew how to drive. The first corner he took, he lost control of the car. The car smashed into the gate of a Jewish preschool. Nobody was hurt, thank god, but now it was bordering on a hate crime. His friends were screaming for Jack to stay in the car but Jack jumped out and started running. The cops formed a perimeter around the area and when Jack tried to pass through it a cop asked his name and where he lived, and Jack said his name was "Lucky Lightning" and he lived on Castle Street. With that, Lucky was arrested, and when no guardian could be contacted, they put him in juvie. "I can't take it. I'm going to faint. I'm going to pass out. I can't handle this." David was losing it waiting for his flight to LA. "Don't cry—get up and go take care of it," I commanded him. Go get him out. You're not collapsing. You're getting it taken care of. You can handle it. "We can figure this out." I hang up and collapse. Of course this happened! Nobody taught Jack the life lesson of how when the cops show up, the party is over. My car is dead. Who cares? It's a car. Everyone could have been killed. Jewish preschool children, Jack's best friends . . . Jack. At this point, I walk out of the theater and collapse on a stoop next to a drunk girl who looks like she's going to be sick. The main thing is that Jack is okay. No point going over all the variations of tragedies that could have happened. This is what happened. Why did I have to be the one who was teaching him to drive? Why didn't I just buy him some condoms or something? The next day, before my flight home, I'm in a coffee shop when a call comes in. A detective calls me to ask me if I want to press charges. In a way, this is the moment I've been waiting for. A chance to show David and Jack what I'm willing to do for them. If only there was a way to videotape myself and talk on the phone at the same time. "No, no. Of course not. He's learned his lesson. I'm actually glad this happened, because now he will get some extra guidance and care. The only thing I ask is that he pay me back for the car, or make some gesture to pay me back. Not that I care about the money. It's not about that. It's about what he's learning from this. How this experience will help him mature." "You're not doing him any favors by not pressing charges. If you press charges he'll have to do the things you're talking about. I can suggest the other things in court, but it won't necessarily happen. Not if you don't press charges. Are you his stepmother?" "No, no. I'm the girlfriend." "Oh, okay." He says it like now it all makes sense. As if I'm only not pressing charges because it's hard enough to get a boyfriend's teenage kid to like you without pressing charges. "I have to pay for my coffee. Thank you for the call." I hang up. Back in Los Angeles, we're not allowed to visit Jack until he's brought to court, which is in three days. In order to not be charged for the storage for the scrap heap of a car, we have to get the car out of the police department and pay to have it towed to a junkyard. It's late at night and nobody is around. The officer on duty smiles when we give her the case number. "Oh yeah, Jack. I was a part of the perimeter." She then tells us about Jack leaping from the car— dodging traffic and giving a false name. "It's hard to run in all this gear," she says, tapping her bullet-proof vest. I say, "I bet." So does David, but the policewoman can't hear him because he's squatting on the floor with his head in his hands waiting for his dizzy spell to pass. David feels responsible for Jack being in there because he was out of town when it happened. That's why he was put there. If David had been home. Or if Jack had a second parent . . . The next morning we get a recommendation for a lawyer from Jack's girlfriend's father and are sitting outside his office waiting to meet with him so we can get Jack out of juvie ASAP. The detective I spoke to on the phone had pretty much pinned the blame on David for not being home in the evenings to supervise Jack and for not being stricter with him. Normally, I'm happy to throw David under the bus and even add a "Guess what else he's done?" or two for good measure, but the image of Jack in juvie takes the fun out of it. The lawyer opens the door to his office and motions for us to come in. We both stand, and he asks David if it's okay to speak with me alone for a moment. "As Jason's stepmother, is there anything about this incident that you'd like to let me know about before I speak with you and David together?" The lawyer is thumbing through papers in his file and seems to be half listening and half thinking about lunch. "Well, I'm not his stepmother, and his name is Jack, and no, I don't think so. I just know that this whole thing is going to be tough on David. I mean,

he's been scared to set boundaries with Jack because of the guilt from Jack losing his mother. I've been begging David to bring Jack to therapy, but he just won't do it, and now, well, here we are." I nod toward the door, knowing that David is seated on the other side having a mini nervous breakdown. The lawyer looks up from the file and asks me, "So you're a performer?" "performer?" His question strikes me as a bit out of left field. Perhaps I'll follow suit and ask him if he's ever seen a grown man cry. I'm about to tell the lawyer that, yes, I am a performer, but today is maybe not the best day to discuss that, but if he wants more info he can look me up on IMDb after we leave. Before I can, though, he takes out a piece of legal paper from the file and starts reading it aloud. "His dad's girlfriend had made a joke in a newspaper article about wanting to move a photo of his mother, who is dead, during sex, and when his dad confronted the girlfriend, Lauren, about making jokes like that in interviews, she brushed him off." The lawyer stops reading and looks directly at me with his eyebrows raised. I want to speak but my throat is constricting. What is happening? He continues, "According to Jack's girlfriend, who we spoke to, to get some background, you were also interviewed by a newspaper for a theater show in New Jersey, and he read it online and saw that you made the same joke about Jack's deceased mother and when Jack told you how upset he was about it, you ignored him? Does that sound right?" New Jersey. The lady from the Trenton paper had chided me for not providing better "newspaper-friendly quotes" about the play. To win her over, I'd started telling her my life story. Including the one about how when I was first dating David, I had to ask him to move the photos of Hannah that were right by his bed while we were having sex. She'd printed everything I'd said. Jack read the article and came into my room one night when David was gone and told me that he didn't want me writing or talking about his mother. Oh god, now I'm remembering how I said to him, "I'm an artist, Jack. I write from my life. I talk about my life." Oh god. How awful. He asked me why I did that. Why couldn't I make things up? Wasn't that what a good writer was? Someone who could create something? I'd defended myself instead of listening to what he had to say or caring about how hurt he'd been. Now Jack is in juvie being ordered by gang members to hand over his pudding or else because of me. I open my mouth to say, "Excuse me," to the lawyer but no sound comes out. I mumble the words and run from his office. I run past David and out into the street and start sobbing. David follows me out. He sits in the car with me with his arms around me. "I really thought that this was all going to be pinned on you," I cried into his shoulder. "I know . . .," David said, "me, too. And, listen, it's not you. He didn't steal your car to get back at you. I promise you that." David's the calmest he's been since this whole thing began. I should have started sobbing years ago. Jack's day in court is endless. Waiting for the trial to begin is almost as traumatic as the trial itself, because we're stuck doing nothing but sitting and worrying that the judge will send him to a work camp. At the beginning of the trial, the judge asks for the family of Jack Thane to please stand. David stands up and I stand up right next to him. It's the first time that anyone has officially called us a family. Eventually, Jack is released and we all walk out together into the blinding Los Angeles sun. Jack hugs his father and then, unable to look at me directly, tells the concrete sidewalk, "I'm sorry." I can't look at him either, so I tell the sidewalk to tell him, "It's okay, Jack. It's really okay. Now, let's eat." We find a Jamaican restaurant a block away from the jail. Jack tears up at lunch from the stress of what's just happened. David and I wait until Jack's hands and eyeballs stop shaking and ask him what we've been dying to ask him: Why did he do it? "Okay, first of all, Lauren always leaves her keys right out on the table, so I just grabbed them—that's why I took her car." David kicks me under the table. "And I know I'm gonna get in trouble for saying this, but in the movies and stuff, nobody just pulls over. Everybody runs. Everybody." If only I had some pudding or a Jolly Rancher I could give to Jack. Some gesture of jail respect that spoke to him. Jack could so easily pin this on me and nobody would have blamed him for doing so, not even me, and he didn't. "I'm so incredibly glad you're okay, but no, Jack. You don't run. When the cops show up, the gig is up. You aren't Lucky Lightning. You are Jack. Fifteen years old. You are not in a movie. You are like the rest of us assholes who have to follow the rules." Normally if I say or do anything remotely stern or parent-like with Jack, I run away right after I do it so I won't have to see the look of "Who do you think you are?" on his face. But considering the circumstances, running away now wouldn't be the best choice. Jack nods. He looks tired but I can tell that he's so incredibly grateful to be sitting with us at a Jamaican restaurant across the street from juvie that he'd agree to anything. Three months later, David and I are engaged. Every few weeks I still find a reason to scream, "DISENGAGED!" David and Jack both know I'm not going anywhere. David asks me to marry him; he gives a very long speech about hope and love and fear and dreams and health insurance. He tells me about how much I mean to Jack, even if he isn't able to express it. His proposal goes on for so long, I start to forget what his point is. But I am grateful that he knows he doesn't have to tell me that I'm the one and only love of his life. If he had, it would have felt scripted and forced and I would have run like Lucky Lightning whether the police were chasing me or not.