

**THE WAY
YOU MADE ME**

By

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THE WAY YOU MADE ME

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THE WAY YOU MADE ME

For Gingernut.

THE WAY YOU MADE ME

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Imogen...30-year-old woman. Gentle, youthful, recovering.

SETTING

Present day. Evening. A small apartment in Portland, OR so it's probably raining or at best, freezing. There are boxes all around—a few chairs, blankets, piles of clothes and miscellaneous items that you really only see out when you're moving.

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**ACT 1
SCENE 1**

Lights up on IMOGEN sitting back on the carpeted floor of her apartment. A glass of white wine sits beside her, poured too full. She's relaxing in the quiet of the evening.

IMOGEN. Can I ask you something kind of silly? What's one of your favorite things in the whole world? Maybe it's a certain smell. Or the particular way that your mother used to scratch your back.

(She goes to a cardboard box in the back and rummages through it.)

It could be the feeling of your body being submerged inside a bag of freshly mowed grass. The way that butter pecan ice cream burns your tongue when you hold it in your mouth. Top ramen; chicken flavored. *(A moment.)* My favorite thing is watching love. Not porn- um. No. Seeing that first swell of excitement all mushed together with fear—it's a beginning and an end all captured in a momentary glance. The flicker of a smile. A breath caught between heart and hope.

(She finds a stuffed animal and takes it back to her spot. She removes her shoes and stretches her toes, cuddling the animal.)

Did you like that line? I thought of it last week when I saw this tiny little baby with its mother. I was sipping my coffee and just watching them together. I'm kind of a creep like that. But I think most writers are. We prey on your precious moments, watch for your little micro-emotions and the tells you don't realize you silently give away, and try to repaint the picture when we're all alone. But, anyway, like I was saying. I was watching this mother and this little chunk of herself; jealous of that

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wonderful smell of something new and perfect. Little thing must have only *just* finished baking, it was so small! Like a teeny tiny cream cheese pastry. Two bites and it'd be back in its mother's belly.

Momma was sipping on her own coffee and it must have been too hot because she looked like she was going to spit it back out; but she managed to swallow. After she did, she made this sort of open-mouthed gaping face, her eyes got all wide and wonky like a cartoon character, and she said "fuck". And you could tell that in that moment, when the skin on the roof of her mouth had peeled back like a split orange, that she forgot she was a mother. She slapped her hand across her mouth and looked at that fresh little croissant of a baby with what I can only describe as absolute devastation. That "oh my god I've ruined you" look.

It all came crashing down around her though, in this wave of relief tinkering with the sound of her little one's laughter. Her eyes all red and wet with tears; she had that look about her, like she'd never experienced anything quite so wonderful. Like she thought she knew love, but then the little loaf made music and all at once she was melted. Butter for her baguette.

"Fuck?" she whispered, unsure. And the baby giggled again. "Fuck" a little louder this time, more surprised. And the baby laughed so hard I could hear the rumble in its diaper from across the room.

"Fuck! Fuck fuck fuck fuck!" And she picked up the little bundle of sweet laughter and snuggled it so tight I thought for sure it would suffocate. Both of them drowned in love and sweetness—neverminding the glares of the church ladies at the table beside her. (*A moment.*) "Caught between heart and hope". I even wrote it on my napkin—I can show you.

(Whether we see it or not, she goes to the kitchen and retrieves the notes.)

I kept it hanging up on my refrigerator next to this one. It's a note I wrote to myself a few months ago. Um. It says... Sorry, I um. I haven't read this out loud before... it's. It's kind of stupi—I'll just read it: "Fall. Shatter and break. Grieve and weep and hurt. But keep all the pieces. And, when you are ready, forge them back

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together in gold. So everyone can see when they look at you—that you are precious. That you are magic.”

(She takes a sip of her wine, nervous. She sets down her glass and takes the note. She clips it up, hanging it from the ceiling.)

I didn't find that on Pinterest either; I really wrote that. I thought it was alright.

(She admires her work for a moment before returning to the box.)

I guess the themes of my work make it kind of obvious that the girl who loves love stories has had her heart broken a few times. And you'd think it would be the divorce, but that last one. The last one hurt. The worst one, really, if I, um. I mean.

(She picks the wine glass back up. Takes a sip. Holds it gently. Paces the room.)

My ex and I, we were together for a few years. He was the first person I dated after my marriage ended. Honestly, I probably should have dated around more before that. I should have had a “bad pancake” relationship before I jumped right into another serious one— you know how the first pancake is always the bad one, right? The messy, burnt but somehow still half-gooey? I needed something sloppy and stupid and silly, and I dove headfirst into, I dunno, a box of granola. It all ended because I watched this movie. It was a love story—

(She goes back to the box and finds a little spinning lantern that projects silhouettes of animals and leaves on the walls.)

and as soon as it started, I was already crying; I mean—nothing had even happened yet! But, you know me. I'm a total cry baby. I'm gonna be real with you, I'll probably cry by the time we're done unpacking; it might get weird. So, this movie. *(Imogen spins and dances a little, pretending she's in the movie. Bedsheets flutter down from the ceiling; perfectly hung up to dry. **Optional: 2 dancers come out and dance in the background.**)*

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It had this beautiful opening sequence of this young couple dancing on rooftops by lantern light, between bed sheets all hung up and twisting in the wind around them. It was so lovely! But that's not the part that got me— there was this moment, during an aria, where that same gentleman from the beginning was watching this other woman sing. A new woman who had never danced with him on rooftops. And when she opened her mouth and music poured out, his face had such a shine. His mouth hung open, eyes glistening, stunned in the presence of an actual angel. And I held a pillow to my chest and burst into tears.

(She drinks and the bedsheets slowly begin to fall to the floor in dead piles. The lantern stays lit, but the animals fade.)

Like I said, we were together for a few years. And at the end of it all he told me “I don't think I've ever really loved you. Not like that.” What's so funny to me is that he said it so, *gently*. Like he really wanted to love me, but didn't know how. And my heart whispered to my head “I know. I've spent years chasing that look. That feeling. Those moments. I know them. And you've never looked at me like that. Never caught your breath or stole a second look at me. Never reached over to hold my hand in the car while we drove. The night I told you I loved you, you whispered back that you weren't sure. Instead, you told me a story about the only woman you'd ever loved; that she had been a bartender at the hotel you had booked us at that night. That you'd only known her for a few hours but that you fallen in love with her. You gave your heart to her and you just weren't sure if you had any left for me. He broke something in me that I didn't know could be hurt.

(She takes a moment, sitting with the memory. She takes a sip.)

I remember calling my mother after we'd broken up, and she asked me *why*? Told me: “sometimes you have to make sacrifices to make relationships work.” Blamed me and said the same thing she had said when I got my divorce— only louder. “Relationships are *work*, Imogen. Sometimes you just have to fake it. You can't just run away when it gets hard”. And I could have screamed.

I told her I was going to focus on being a writer and she told me: “sometimes we have to let our passions fall and fade so that we can invest our worth in someone

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else. You need to learn to let your hobbies be hobbies” (*A breath.*) My mother didn’t tell me she was sorry. She didn’t ask if I was okay. She said, and I quote, “tell him we love him.” And then she hung up.

(She drinks, walks over to her mirror and pulls a sticky note off the glass.)

I have another note that says “You are worthy of being pursued.” And I am. And I know this. But it’s good to be reminded sometimes.

(She hangs the note from the ceiling.)

When you’ve been told over and over again that you aren’t worthy of love— of respect, friendship, affection— it can be easy to forget. So, I leave myself little notes, so I don’t. (*A pause.*) I also like to send love notes to my friends; just in case they’re forgetful too.

(She digs into her box and pulls out more notes, hanging them as she reads them.)

Sometimes it’s a: “you’re killin’ it! Great job on that Dr. Seuss rap you did for your 4th graders!” Or a “you are truly a goddess among us”, “I am so proud of you”. Or, and this is my favorite way to do it: (*very nonchalantly*) “Hey, I meant to tell you earlier, I was just *sooo* busy I almost completely forgot but-- I love you to pieces”. “I meant to say it this morning when we were still rubbing the sleep from our eyes, limbs all tangled up together like the roots of an ancient tree, but you are so special to me.... Also, we’re out of mushrooms, would you pick some up on your way home?”

(She giggles a little, takes a sip and puts her drink down. She moves the furniture closer together and at various angles.)

And there’s that word: *home*... I remember my 16th birthday. We were moving out of my childhood home to this new place up in the mountains, and everyone was so busy and caught up in the move that they all forgot. My mother, my father, my brother and sister. Everyone forgot that I had turned 16. The birthday that MTV

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made a show about. That Disney told me would be one of my most memorable. That my friends from school had gushed about.

(She goes back to the box and starts rummaging, she knows what she's looking for. She pulls out a small stack of photos and flips through them until she finds the one she remembers.)

And that night I cried on my old mattress that laid dead on the floor in my new room. It wasn't home. Just bones. Just some stupid house. The next week my mom surprised me with a cake and sang me a quiet happy birthday in the kitchen. You can see in the picture that was taken, I'm holding up a beautiful *Happy 16th Birthday* cake in my pajamas, and even though I'm smiling you can tell that I had cried. Eyes red and just thankful to be remembered. *(She hangs up the photo.)* I spent the next 12 years trying to find *home*. I moved in and out with partners, traveled to different states and found apartments that I nicknamed home. A temporary place to sleep and eat. A place to fuck and for fuckery. The place to drink and get stoned and push back the furniture so you can play hookie and learn fresh dance moves to shitty electronic techno music. None of them felt like mine though. Just placeholders.

(She grabs one of the crumpled-up sheets off the ground and it lifts back up into the sky. She straightens it out a little and starts to build a fort in the middle of the room.)

It wasn't until I was 28, single for the first time since I was, jesus, probably 15. And I was struggling to keep the electricity on and keeping the pieces of my broken heart all piled together in a bowl on a borrowed nightstand. But it was there that I found it.

After that breakup I moved into a 300 square foot studio apartment above a furniture store that charged me \$500 a month in rent. It had been built in the 1920s and part of its charm was that everything was "original 1920s fixtures". Super cute, right? But that's the other thing, \$500 a month for rent in 2019 is a fucking steal, so I'm not gonna say no— but keep in mind, you're also living with *original 1920s fixtures in 2019* and sometimes you just want to run your microwave with the lights on but you can't because it'll overload the circuits. Sometimes you don't want to

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have to worry about getting lead poisoning from drinking out of the tap-- or having to race by the store window with your head ducked low because you don't want to get sucked into another 45 minute long "conversation" about why your racist porn-stashed landlord doesn't want to rent to Mexicans—or "anyone that doesn't speak English" ... yea. (*She groans, annoyed*). But most days, you're just happy that you're home. That you're in a place that is *yours*. That each painting hanging on the walls is one that *you* picked and the music coming out of the speakers is what *you* want to listen to, and you can take a 2-hour bath in that big clawfoot tub next to a bottle of wine because no one else has a key to the place where you exist and can tell you to get out.

(Even if the fort is a disaster, she smiles because it's hers. Eventually she settles down in front of it with her glass.)

Sometimes I would worry about choking on my dinner and no one realizing that I'd died sputtering on week old spaghetti, face stuck to the dark orange 70s linoleum on my kitchen floor. I wasn't allowed to have pets so, really the only thing that would give away my death would be the smell. And again, this was a 1920s apartment, so everything smelled like dust, death, and someone's great depression. I would've been there awhile before anyone really noticed. So, I chewed very carefully. And I smiled extra wide. Because it's was so good to be home after chasing it for so long. And then you came along.

(Whether they drop from the ceiling or get hung up, more notes appear)

Lovely. Wonderful. Complicated. Fucked up. Hilarious. Ambitious. You. (*She giggles a little.*) Did I ever tell you that I fell in love with you the moment I saw you? It's true-- I swear. I wouldn't lie. I know it's corny. I'm kind of corny. (*She hiccups*) Oh, pardon me—

(She spreads out the furniture and uses the bedsheets to make the fort bigger. Make it better.)

Do you remember back in college? I was helping write that script for the devised piece. Yea, your very first show. Think your name was Gingersnap or— *Gingernut*.

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I think it was some reference to a muffin. Or. I don't know. Some sick joke about the red hair, maybe? But that was your character. Gingernut. I was sitting in the top left of the house, taking notes, trying to figure out what it meant to be a real writer for a real show and the director said "Okay, Gingernut. I want you to sprint from back of house and jump up on the stage".

(With a blanket or a towel or something draped around her shoulders, she runs from one side of the room to the other as fast as she can, stopping with a jump, panting.)

I looked up just in time to see a blur of bright red hair. You were so fast! You burst from the back, up onto that stage, tall and scrawny and 19, and my whole body—just, this wave of—I don't—I just knew, in my bones, in my fingertips, I knew in that moment that you were going to be special to me.

I can't believe how long ago that was! It feels like we were just there. But it was your first year, I think my second year. Almost 6 years ago, I think? Can that be right? You told me recently that you were intimidated by me back then. That I looked like an adult. A grown-up—which is hilarious. I mean. Look at me. I'm building a fucking blanket fort in the middle of our living room. Filing taxes was too hard last year so I just, didn't, and I don't think I will *ever* understand fractions. Seriously though, when are you supposed to start feeling like a like a "grownup"? Maybe it's just our outsides that get old... Anyways, I guess I never showed that I was scared. That I was *completely* lost, but maybe it's just that I'm a few years older than you and took things too seriously. I guess I still do.

(Playing with the edges of the fort, fixing it and perfecting it. Maybe grabbing pillows or things that would be comfy to throw inside.)

Over the years we have been friends, we have played cousins and spouses onstage, we have been lovers and strangers. We'd get so close and then you would disappear for months at a time. The first time you left I was, hurt. My head was screaming "This is your fault! Your fault! Your fault!" But then it happened again, and again, and after a while it just seemed to be, what you did.

(The lantern burns out)

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But only to me; usually when you started dating someone new. And every time you left it stung all the same as it did the first time. But I didn't yell at myself... not so loudly anyway.

(She gives the lantern a little spin and it wakes back up. She digs through the box and collects more to hang up.)

But you would always come back. Back to talking to me every day for hours at a time. Back to “can I see you tonight?” text messages at noon. Back to stupid nicknames—you know that voicemail you left me, the one that starts with “What’s up my little plate of hashbrowns?!”, those nicknames are my favorite. We’d be back to sleeping in my bed. Back to holding my hand in the car or in the dark between blackbox seats. Back to 1am drives around deserted suburban neighborhoods.

(She hangs up the wedding veil.)

You were the first person I told when I realized I didn't love my husband anymore. And, if we're baring naked hearts, you're the reason I knew I didn't love him anymore...

(She runs her fingers down the veil, remembering.)

...but I've never told you that. Not until now, anyway. I mean, it's not like you didn't know how I felt— please. Who am I kidding? *Everyone* knew how I felt about you. I have been in and around love with you since the moment you jumped on that stage. I swear, you make my skin shine. You give me away. Your fault.

Skip ahead, just a few years after that first show, and suddenly you're my best friend. And now, my partner. Sometimes I feel like I need to scream “Someone pinch me! Please.” I mean, what the hell did I do to deserve all of this goodness?! Waking up to kisses and your soft *I love you's*. And thinking back on that night, where I was laying my head on your lap, and hearing you ask me “partners?” I'm dreaming. I must be. This can't be real-life because no one just *gets* what they want anymore.

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(She starts grabbing clothes out of boxes and pulling them out, organizing them in neat little piles, trying to stay busy.)

Your shoes live beside my shoes now. Your brush hangs just above my own. When we fall asleep your heart beats against my shoulder blades and echoes into my dreams. But my queen-sized bed that spooned my star-fished limbs feels too small for two bodies— and I can't make 2 towels last a month or take my contacts out in bed and leave them on my nightstand anymore— but I can't wait for you to get home so I can open the door for you. So I can taste you. Hold you. So I can cook for us. Cheap things mostly. Spaghetti. Macaroni and cheese. Sometimes I'll bake eggplant or spoon melted butter over broccoli so we don't feel left wanting more. I shave my legs again, but I've stopped wearing makeup. I trust you to see me bare. To see this not so broken girl, with her "pushing 30" body, so much like that quirky little studio apartment where the faucets don't work unless you know just the right way to jiggle them. Windows that creak open and don't close all the way unless you jam the heel of your hand against their metal spines. *(A breath.)* Your hands know me best. You know my edges and where the paint has chipped, the glances I give and what it means when my voice shifts from side to side. You don't kick it to fix it, not like so many others. You speak to me, and you hold me; turn me over in your arms and ask me what hurts. Say to me, "let's fix this."

(She takes a sip. A moment.)

Can I tell you a secret? I'm. I'm scared of this. I guess, really, I'm only scared to lose you. Scared that if I trust you to want me back. That if I trust you with my heart, that you won't give it back in pieces. Trusting you to be honest with me. To love me. To talk to me. To go through the rough patches and the miles of quicksand with me. It's so easy to want to let you. I'm scared to share a place with you-- to have a place that isn't just mine anymore because that means that it's also yours and I mean-- what if we don't like the same color of plates?

(She throws the clothing to the side, picks up her glass and paces around the fort, looking at ALL of the stuff.)

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What if you come into the house while I'm washing dishes and you turn off my music without asking because you don't like it-- and what do you mean you're allergic to garlic? How am I supposed to cook anything? And what if we run out of things to talk about? (*She starts to relax.*) Or is it still the same as it was at Mother Gibbs' table, what was that line in *Our Town*? "Good weather or bad weather, we always find things to say"? It was something like that...

(She gives over to daydreaming. It starts to rain. She wraps a blanket around her shoulders and goes to the notes hanging from the ceiling.)

Come sit by the window on stormy Oregon days with me. Wrap me in your arms and snuggle into the crook of my neck. Tell me your favorite inch of me, or better yet, show me. And I'll cook us something warm with spices that make the air of our place feel foreign and new.

(She drops the blanket and retrieves a soccer ball away from one of the piles and rolls it around in her hands, bounces it on her knees lightly, seeing how good she can be— and she's pretty good.)

We'll sip hot cocoa in our living room because I know you only like the taste of coffee when I've been drinking it. We'll cuddle up on our carpeted floor, because we're young and broke and can't afford a couch, or chairs, or anything really, and we'll listen to the rain. Talk about goofy podcasts. Talk about where we want to go. London could be nice. Amsterdam maybe? Talk about what's for dinner. Talk about basketball and soccer and swords and travel and sex and whatever comes next. (*Whether it's kicked, shot like a basketball, or placed gently inside, the ball goes back into the box.*) You'll say "you have me. Don't worry so much." And then you'll kiss me. Tell me you love me. And I'll be home.

I remember the first time you kissed me. Not a stage kiss. A real kiss. It was in college. We woke up together in the early morning on the hard ground. Your hand held mine in the dark; a blanket pulled over our heads. We'd fallen asleep beside each other at a party. A sleepover on the big theatre stage. Friends and actors slept all around us. None of them knew how you pressed your thumb to my bottom lip. Pushed it inside my mouth.

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And I was married.

And you kissed me tentative. Kissed me wondering. Bit me hard and tasted me sweet. Pulled me close until someone in the cast cleared their throat and turned on the lights. Said “Good *morning*. Time to get up”. *Caught you*.

I ran into you somewhere between tearing myself off of that stage and force-feeding myself dry bites of bagel. I looked up at your face-- not your eyes, I couldn't-- felt all of the blood rush from my legs and into my neck and cheeks. I ducked my head. Walked fast away from you like the schoolgirl I was and threw up in the bathroom sink. I never told you that either.

(She starts to organize compulsively, piling and re-folding in her shame. She tears the sheets off of the fort and puts them back, trying to make it perfect.)

You know, I finally told my mom that I'd signed for that new job. Full-time. Permanent. Good pay. She said “That's great! You deserve a win. You've had a hard 8 years.” And she isn't wrong. I just expected her to say *months*.

(She makes herself stop. She goes back to the box and finds her old cowboy hat. She tries it on and shakes her head. Photos of mountains and cacti flicker across the wall. She hangs it up.)

I mean, has it really been that long? 8 years? 8 years of kicking my way through? Have I been treading water all this time? I mean, Christ, 8 years ago I was-- I was moving to Arizona. I was starting over. Again. It was when I realized that family is what you strive to be but sometimes blood is just... a hematoma.

That sounds really heavy without context. I um. I don't actually know if you ever knew this; don't know how you would without me telling you. So, there's my step-dad—the only father I have ever truly known. I don't think I've ever called him my step-dad to his face. It feels weird just saying it. And then there's the man on my birth certificate. The man in coke-bottle glasses posing with a newborn me beside my hospitalized mother. Allan. That was my “birth-dad”.

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When I was a kid, I would imagine what it would be like to hear his voice. Sneak peeks at the picture to see if I could find myself somewhere in his face. I spent so many years wondering why he never tried to contact me; was I so expendable? It was actually in Arizona that I found him, on Facebook, of course. I held my breath and I sent him a message. And it wasn't long before he responded. He wrote: "I was your mom's first husband, yes". I had waited 20 years for this, I was so excited-- I wrote him back almost immediately. And then he blocked me. I told my boyfriend at the time that it wasn't a big deal. That I could let it die. Sometimes dads are deadbeats. I just, imagined it would be different; you know?

It was about a week later that my whole world was shook. And I realize that this is a dated sentence but, a strange man sent me a private message on Tumblr. He said, "I don't know if your mother ever told you about me, but I'm your biological father". And I laughed; I knew better. I wrote him back, said "Prove it. Tell me something only someone who knew my mother back then would know." It was Tumblr after all. And then he wrote me back the city, the house, the bedroom, and the view from her window in the home she lived in with her grandmother. And then I said (*with a nervous laugh*) "I'll be right back".

I called my mother who was already 2,000 miles away from me but somehow it didn't seem far enough, and found out I had been lied to. That for 20 years my biological father had lived the next town over from me. That someone who had *wanted to know me* had been kept from me.

My mother said, "there was never a good time to tell you". And I found out that mother's tell lies bigger than Santa Claus. I found my biological father— or, he found me, I guess. It's like I said before: blood clots. Blood can be poisoned. Can kill you.

(She pulls out pictures of her biological father, pictures of her family, pictures of her and her love from the box and starts hanging them up, some of the moments are reflected behind her.)

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You don't have to be blood to be family though. And I love that you call me yours. I think this is what family is supposed to feel like. Like I can be myself around you— and not just the parts I know you're fond of. Waking up with you each morning. Holding your body to mine. Tracing your tattooed skin and kissing my dreams into the curve of your spine. This is family. This is home. This is belonging. Thank you for that.

(She digs through her box, she pulls out tarot cards, yearbooks, a graduation cap, notebooks.)

How is there so much crap? I bet you, half of these notebooks are mostly empty. Okay, I'm going to tell you something and I know you'll tell me I'm a total nerd—but I love unpacking. I love rediscovering all of the little things that sit in boxes or on bookshelves. It's like finding little pieces of magic, sort of. Not like, big spells or anything. Not world changing. But you can feel it inside your belly. Like something is coming alive right in the middle of you. Like the little star that our atoms were pulled from is sparking back to life with remembering. *(She opens the notebooks.)* Hm. I um. I wrote a note at the beginning of the year. Do you want to hear it? It's for you. It says:

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