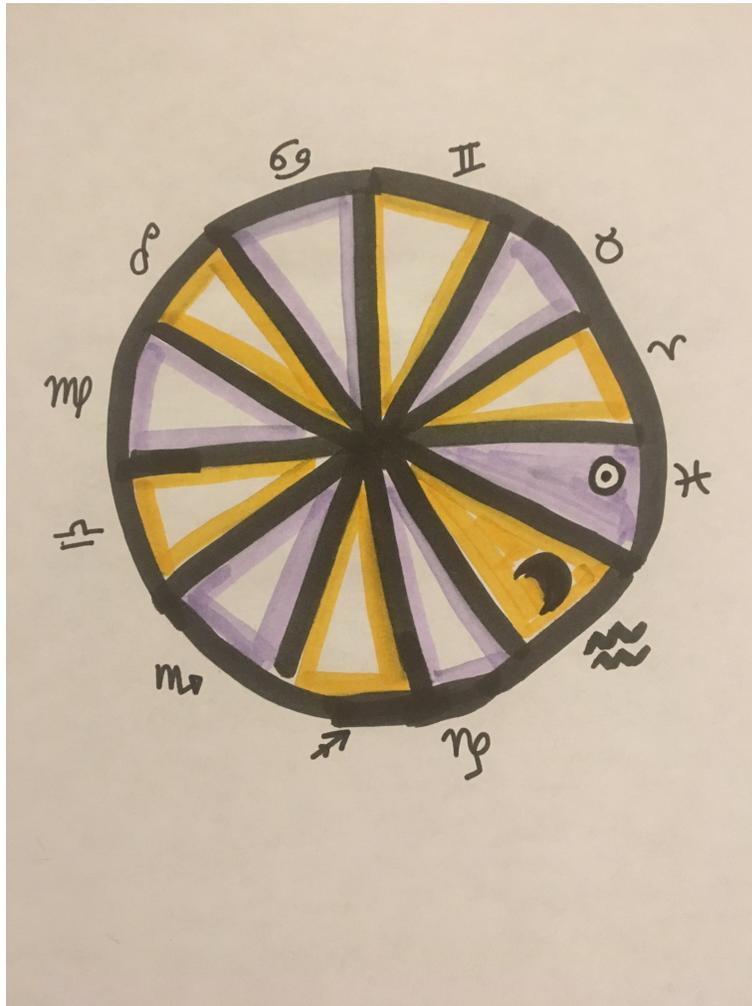


*p(ART)ner*

***I. prologue / actress***

**by jaime allyce wright**



snapshot of a nativity  
**satur(n)day**, march 4, 1989  
7:26 PM  
new york, ny, nyc, new york

**[sun in the house of bad fortune,  
moon in the house of good fortune]**

\*

When it all begins, you are sixteen, and you are an actress. You don't know the mechanics of it yet –you know barely more than the fact that you're a Pisces—but you are experiencing your first Saturn opposition. The planet is just finishing up a transit of your tenth house of reputation, public image & career. You've just come off a successful run of playing Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream: The Rock Musical*, to many, many accolades. You are kind of a square. Most Friday nights are spent with Cary & Megan: both approaching eighteen, seniors. You are beloved, a younger friend, *almost a pet*. The three of you have a tradition called a *caker*. *Cakers* entail: hitting up the Gristede's located in the shopping center adjacent to your town's senior community, and picking up a frozen Pepperidge Farm cake. The cake is then thawed *just* enough, and devoured as quickly as possible, straight from the box, while watching a Turner Classic Movie, or an episode of *Scrubs*. This is your version of a *kegger*. Summer is approaching. You're on top of the world. At the end of the summer, your friends will go to college.

For your big English 10H research paper, you are assigned *Franny and Zooey* by J.D. Salinger. A theme of *Franny & Zooey* is the battle against ego— or perhaps, it is the battle to transcend ego. It is the story of two precocious New Yorkers— geniuses— who also happen to be actors. You've always considered these *ways of being* (genius & actor) to be mutually exclusive; you've found that they get in each other's way. Intellect is of the mind, while acting is of the soul. Intellect is a solid, while acting is a liquid. Salinger introduces you to a world where they *co-exist*, though maybe not successfully. He introduces you to reckoning with *your* ego. *You still want to be an actress*, but now you've started romanticizing the *internal* struggle, rather than just the *physical* one. For the first time, you feel melancholy in a productive way. Now, whatever you do, you do it for The Fat Lady.

\* & the *Fat Lady* sings:

Your crush who you have been harboring a secret crush on, finds out that you have a crush on them, through a series of unfortunate events related to AOL Instant Messenger. They don't reciprocate. It's embarrassing. The feeling is: *panic*. To cope, you volunteer first to do a trust fall in gym class. You do well. Your gym teacher now expects more from you. You don't have your driver's license yet, but you're okay with it. Your friends can drive.

The summer is approaching. You might be heartbroken. At the end of the summer, your friends will go to college.

On a Friday night in the spring, you rent the movie *Garden State*, from your local Blockbuster. You also rent *I Heart Huckabees*. You are practicing for when Cary & Megan go to college, and there will be no more *cakers*. Because you are a contrarian by nature, and because everyone else loves it so much, you expect to hate *Garden State*. The Full Moon is bright outside. You pop in the DVD. "Motorcycle Ride With Sam" by Chad Fischer plays on the menu slide. You press play. Despite yourself, you love it.

You write in your LiveJournal:

*"i decided that i really do want to go into directing  
and movies and stuff.  
like, i think i want to start out in acting,  
but move my way up to writing my own movies  
and directing them  
and things like that.  
and if i'm not successful?  
oh well.  
for me, its all about the art.  
and i'm sorry if i sound  
"indier than thou"  
or something  
because i'm not trying to be.  
that's truly just really what i want to do with my life!  
i want to create,  
that's all i've ever really wanted to do."*

\*

Throughout your life, you will lose sight of this mindset *constantly*, as one born with a Balsamic-phase Aquarius moon in the fifth house (of theatre) is wont to do. You will forget that you want to create—although it is the truth! From the mouth of babes! You need attention, but you hate to ask for it. Because of this, you are continually drawn to performance, constantly in pursuit of #showz. You need to be center stage. It is your *primal circumstance* to be under a spotlight. You search for friends and for community because you imagine yourself as a nucleus. A nucleus of their attention. And once you get their attention, you feel like a nasty, seedy film is covering your body, like the surface of the snack table one week after a particularly successful party: never cleaned. Immediately, you feel sticky and nauseous. Once you have their attention, you immediately feel dead. You are suffocated by your ego. Because it is so large.

You are sixteen years old.  
The summer is over.  
Cary leaves you a note that begins,  
“If everything goes as planned, you won’t see this until I’m gone...”  
It’s a funny note, but you cry.  
Virgo season climaxes.  
Fall is approaching.  
Your friends went to college.

On a Saturday afternoon, you are standing at the bar at the Starbucks in Yorktown.

The barista turns to you and says, “What are you thinking about?”  
“What?” you say.  
“I can hear your wheels turning.”  
He smiles encouragingly as he hands you your Chai Tea Latte.

\*

Each morning, you get down on your knees on the dirty floor of Somers High School.

Go Tuskers! This is how you must open your locker. You look forward to the National Honor Society meeting on Wednesdays. Living for the few moments you feel like yourself.

Saturn, planet of solitude, is now transiting your 11th house of friends, allies, dreams and wishes. The house of good spirit.

\*

SATs come and go, and senior year arrives. You must commence applying to college. Your dream is NYU Tisch. BFA Acting. But, convinced that you *are* Rory Gilmore and all that she contains— cherubic scholarship, divine gluttony, fictional socioeconomic privilege— the fantasy you paint of life at NYU is not the liquid joy of studying theater in a conservatory setting (the rolling on the floor if you will), but the solid happiness of scarves, imagined cobbled streets, and many hours huddled in a library, without a name. You dream not of art school, but of an autonomous cocoon. On some days, you dream of a vacuum. But to art school you apply.

You are not re-elected to the Board of the National Honor Society. You cry about this for the entire duration of your visit to Muhlenberg College. To make matters worse, you are fired from the quarterly student newspaper, *The Tusker Times*, of which you are the Features Editor.

You are fired because you miss editing day because you skip school to mourn the fact that you weren't cast in a speaking role, or even as a featured ensemble member, in the spring musical, *Pippin*.

*You donate blood at the blood drive. You are type O+: not rare, but useful.*

\*

Over February break, you visit Cary in Los Angeles where she is studying screenwriting at USC. Cary has just started dating her first boyfriend, Rain, and she doesn't have much interest in hanging out with you on your visit. One night though, she takes you to a college party. There you meet someone who is in the theater program, and halfheartedly ask him a few questions because you have applied there too. He tells you that BFA stands for "Best. Fucking. Actor." And that he is not one of them. The BFAs that is. He is from San Luis Obispo. You don't know where that is.

"North," he says. You do a shot of vodka with the NOT Best Fucking Actor, and admit to him that it is the first time you've ever ingested alcohol. This embarrasses Cary. She wishes you would just *Play. It. Cool.* This is the person who inconsolably cried the night of October 10, 2003 when Ben Berger tried to enter her house with a six pack of beer. A betrayal. You think, "Remember *cakers, Cary???????*"

You return from Los Angeles, and you have nothing. Even the existentialism unit in AP English Literature cannot bring you joy, not even reading for Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. Saturn is still transiting your 11th house. Every wish, every dream, every ally has been put through the ringer. Examined. Isolated. Turned to dust. Not much has come out on the other side. Looking for what lights you up, who makes you shine, has left you alone in a gaping void. In pursuit of making your presence larger than life, you have failed to buoy yourself. Your orbit grows more and more irregular as you resist the gravitational pull of being truly known.

\*

On a Saturday afternoon trip to Borders in Mt. Kisco, with your Dad, you notice a sign advertising that Starbucks is holding an Open House interview for aspiring baristas.

You think about how much you love Chai Tea Lattes.  
You think about how Steve the barista could hear your wheels turning.  
You sense a buoy.

You have your driver's license, but you don't have a car so you ask your friend Leighann to drive you to Mt. Kisco for the Open House on February 28, 2007. A few days before your 18th birthday.

Krista, the District Manager, interviews you, and finds you quite charming. You tell her that you want to be an actress, and she thinks you're very smart. You meet a few of the store managers. They like you too. Krista tells you that they'll be in touch soon.

Getting back in the car, Leighann asks, "How did it go?"

You say, "Really well. They liked me!"

"So did you get the job?"

"I think so, but they're not sure which store yet. I told them I didn't want to work at Yorktown. Too close. Don't want to see people from school."

"Makes sense."

"Yeah."

"That would be cool if you worked at Starbucks. You could get free stuff!"

"Yeah, it will be cool."

\*

You turn away from Leighann to look out the window as she pulls onto the main road. To your right, you notice the strip mall where you take piano lessons so you can learn to play "Baobabs" by Regina Spektor. You think of your teacher— a kind divorcee. He humors you. It's raining. Seattle-esque. Your favorite weather. A sense of purpose cascades over you. This feels lucky. Fated. A pull. A buoy. North. The beginning. Creation. Something. It's not much, but it's something.