

Fake It 'Til You Make It

By Jessica Dunn

Rachel is a girl. She collects shiny rocks. She spends hours listening to raindrops collect in jars that she puts on her window ledge. The rain falls through the open window and on her arms and face, but she does not care. Sometimes, she lies on her back and watches the ceiling fan go around and around until all the blades blur together. She does not smile like other children. When she laughs, the sound she makes is flat. If they touch her, she screams and bangs her head on the floor until she loses consciousness. That is because Rachel is crazy.

I look down at my stomach; it is round and hard, like a melon. I move my head closer to it and rap it with three fingers like old ladies do with cantaloupe in the grocery store. Once I asked one of them why she tapped the melons and she said if you heard a hollow sound that meant it was ripe. I listen to see if my stomach makes a hollow sound.

A few minutes later, there is a tap from the inside and I wonder if the thing within is listening to see if the world makes a hollow sound.

In four months the thing within will become the thing without. I have seen videos where women push and scream to get it out of them and I think that they must be afraid to leave it inside and afraid to feel it coming out. The screaming and crying and all the lights in the hospital room on the television give me a headache so I always turn it off before I see what all the pushing is about. Sometimes they cut open the hard rind of the stomach and take it out and the woman does not scream or struggle. That is what I want them to do. Let them take it so I don't have to feel the thing falling out of me.

Rachel will not put her feces in the toilet. She does it in the corner of her bedroom and hides them in the bottom of her toy chest. Even when they make her use the toilet, she will not flush it. She just stares down at the pieces of her floating outside. When they flush it for her, she hits them and they hold her down and let her scream until she can not make another sound. This is because Rachel is afraid to send anything that was inside her so far away.

Sharon tells me that cutting it out will leave a scar. She says that natural childbirth is best. Sharon works in the library and so do I. She talks to me because I am very quiet and she believes this means that I am a "good listener." Today Sharon asks me if I know who the father is. I say that I know who made me "pregnant." I say "pregnant" because that is what you are supposed to say when you have a thing in your uterus and that thing is not a tumor. In French, you say je suis pleine, which means 'I am full.' I think that is a better way of saying it.

Sharon says that he should pay me for making me pregnant, but this does not make sense to me because usually someone pays you when you give them a thing, and not the other way around. I do not say this; I simply say that I do not want to and Sharon laughs loudly; her laugh

is rolling and nasal. Then she says that “a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle” and I mimic her laugh because I know that she has made a joke. I also know that it is not her joke, but it is from a book written by Gloria Steinem with a glossy, blue and white cover and its call number is 305.4 S822S.

On my second day of work I had told one of the librarians an entire call number without looking it up. He was very surprised and he told all the other librarians behind the desk and they asked me to do it again. They gave me another title, but that time I took the number in my head and subtracted three from the first number, two from the second and so on. That way they thought that I had just happened to remember the first one and that it was a coincidence. No one ever asks me to remember call numbers anymore. Now I write them down when I go from the front desk to the shelves, like everyone else.

Rachel is eight years old. She can multiply numbers like 3,598 by 1,569 in her head. She can remember a random string of up to twenty-five digits after seeing it written once. These are games that she likes to play. This is because Rachel is a savant. When others hear her games, they make her take tests for hours. Some of the tests are puzzles which are fun, but most of the tests are pictures that you have to make into stories. These tests make Rachel angry because stories are not pictures and making things into something they are not is not fun. If she does not finish the tests, they make her talk to strangers, as many as three at a time. When the strangers talk to her, she hums until she can not hear them anymore. Eventually, she stops playing her games. This is because Rachel can learn.

Sharon says “Rachel, having a baby is the most wonderful experience” and I nod because do not want to talk about my uterus anymore. But if I say this, she will ask me a question and then I will have to answer the question or she will ask me why I do not want to answer the question...ad infinitum, which means ‘unto infinity.’ Sharon continues, because she thinks that when I nod, it is an invitation to continue and not an invitation to go away. This is why I do not like gestures, because they are ambiguous, like the picture of a white vase on a black background that is also two faces in profile. If I try to see both pictures at once, I get a headache, and it is the same with gestures.

Rachel lies on her back in the room with a couch and watches the ceiling fan. Sometimes she holds her hand, fingers splayed, above her eyes and moves it back and forth, slowly at first, and then faster and faster. The pattern of light and shadow makes her calm. This is because when she is looking at the pattern, nothing else can get in and she is alone, even when there are people in the rooms nearby. When someone else is in the couch room with her, they stand over her, so that she can not see the fan. She continues to move her fingers back and forth, but the pattern is not the same. They tell her to “look them in the eye.” They do this every day for a month. She screams and they ignore her; she bangs her head against the floor and they call for people to pick her up and take her into the padded room with no ceiling fan; she starts to look them in the eye and they start to leave her alone. Rachel does not even turn ceiling fans on anymore. This is because Rachel likes to be alone more than she likes the patterns.

Five months ago, a man who used to come to the library every day asked to take me home after work. I live in an apartment on the fifth floor of an eight story building. I walk up

sixty-five steps to get to my floor. I do not take the elevator because it always smells like a crowd of sweaty people, even when there is no one else inside. My apartment has four small rooms: a bathroom, a living room, a kitchen and a bedroom. The bedroom has a ceiling fan with an attached light and my bed is right underneath it. There are two switches next to the door, one for the fan and one for the light. I never use the fan switch.

The man who drove me home walked up the stairs with me. When I opened the door to my apartment and went inside, the man followed. I did not want him to come into my apartment, but I did not tell him this, because you are not supposed to tell people to go away for “no good reason” and not wanting someone to be near you is not a good reason. When you do not have a good reason for something, you have to use gestures, even though they are ambiguous. One gesture that makes people go away is to not look at them and not to talk to them, even when they say something to you. This is called “ignoring” them. The man did not understand that my gestures meant that I wanted him to leave. He thought it meant that I wanted him to touch me. He took my hand and led me into my bedroom. He flipped both switches on when he walked through the door. I stayed very still while he reached under my shirt and took off my underwear. I stayed very still because I do not like to be touched but telling someone not to touch you is like telling someone to go away; you have to have a good reason and I could not think of one. While he was on top of me, I looked at the fan above me, but I did not see patterns and I did not let the blades blur together. I did not move until I heard the front door slam and then I put my underwear on and turned off the fan. The man does not come to the library anymore.

Rachel screams when anyone touches her and bangs her head against the floor. When they ask her why she does this, she tells them that it hurts. They tell her that being touched does not hurt, unless someone touches too hard. She tells them that it is always too hard and they tell her that she is wrong. They take her into a padded room and someone touches her on the arm to show that it does not hurt. Rachel screams until her throat is sore. She tries to bang her head onto the floor until she knocks herself unconscious, but it is not hard enough. She tries to bang her head against the wall, but it is made of the same soft material as the floor. After a long time, Rachel stops moving when they touch her. She does not scream when they pick her up and carry her back to her room. This is because Rachel has no other choice.

Sharon tells me that the thing inside me is a piece of me to send out into the world. When you cut an apple into pieces, the pieces are still apple. If I cut a part of myself out, the part is still me. I do not want to flush me out into the world so far away. Sharon is talking about pieces of us in the world and I begin to hum so that I can not hear her. She stops and asks me if I am upset; when I keep humming, she reaches out and touches my hand. I want to scream, but screaming is like a gesture and some people think it means you want a lot of them to crowd around you. Instead I stay very still and quiet until she stops and then I say that I am sick and need to go home. I say this, because that is how you are supposed to ask to be left alone, even though it is not a question.

I am in the hospital and I am not sick; it is time for the thing to come out. The nurse in the doctor’s office asks if I am sure that I want a “caesarian section.” I say that I want Rachel to be cut out, which is what caesarian section means. The nurse smiles and asks me if I know that it will be a girl and I nod. I do not know that the thing will be a girl, but I do know that it will be

me. I nod because I know that saying the thing inside you is you is “a strange thing to say”. When you say strange things people ask you questions and I do not want to answer any, because there is rarely such thing as just one question and more than one question makes me tired. I watch the ceiling pass over me as they push me into surgery. I close my eyes and feel Rachel move inside me and wonder if I will still feel when she moves after they take her out.

I wake up in a bed with a curtain around it and the nurse leans toward me, holding Rachel. She is screaming and trying to pitch her body out of the nurse’s arms. The nurse puts her in my arms and her screams become even louder. The nurse tells me that I was asleep for so long that they had to bottle feed Rachel, but that she still hasn’t stopped crying. I say that I want to put her down in a crib next to me. She asks me if I am sure and I nod. The nurse leaves for a few minutes and comes back wheeling a basinet, which is a very small crib with smooth, plastic sides instead of bars. I put Rachel into the basinet and her screams become softer. The nurse says she has never seen an infant stop crying when someone put it down. This is because Rachel is not an infant, she is me. I do not say this, instead I ignore the nurse who understands this gesture and goes away. I splay my fingers and hold them a few inches above her eyes. I move them back and forth, slowly at first, and then faster and faster. I roll over onto my back, with my fingers still moving a few inches in front of her eyes. I hold my other hand above my eyes just like they are above Rachel’s and begin to move it as well. The pattern of light and shadow soothes us, because nothing else can get in, even though there are people behind the other curtains.

We are a woman and a very small girl. We collect shiny rocks. We spend hours listening to raindrops collect in jars we put on the window ledge. The rain falls through the open window on our arms and face, but we do not care. Sometimes, we lie on the bed together and watch the ceiling fan go around and around until all the blades blur together. We do not smile like other people. When we laugh, we do not mimic anyone and the sound we make is flat. If anyone touches us, we will scream and bang our heads against the floor. This is because we are Rachel.