

# WISH YOU WERE ME

MYRIAM GURBA



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*The entries herein are works of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or have been used fictitiously, except the Introduction, which is totally true. And maybe that part about Kevin Bacon, as well as several other parts which are nonfiction.*

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# INTRODUCTION:

## WHAT WRITING IS LIKE FOR ME

Reading *The Bell Jar* convinced me that becoming a writer meant turning into Sylvia Plath. I graduated high school and packed *The Bell Jar* in the suitcase I took to college. *The Bell Jar* lived on my dorm room desk, my bible.

Like Sylvia Plath, disturbing ideas began nagging me. I recorded them on paper scraps and stuck these in *The Bell Jar*. These lists were so grotesque they were poetry.

In June, the dorms emptied. I returned home to spend the summer before sophomore year at my parents'. As I was walking up a residential street one afternoon, a man attacked me. He committed sex crimes.

I recounted the attack to a local detective. At the police station, he showed me perverts' mug shots. None looked familiar. I and *The Bell Jar* went back to college.

In autumn, police caught my attacker. The courts built a death-penalty case against him. His prosecutor called me. He explained that my attacker attacked many women. He expressed condolences. He was sorry our attacker butchered one of us.

That winter, I visited a psychiatrist. I described my weird thoughts and urges. She diagnosed me with a trio of mental diseases: Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Tourette Syndrome, and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

On my way home from her office, I thought, "If I can just write some awesome poems about my period and then throw myself off the roof, things will be okay."

Awesome period poems never came. A handful of dull, slouching poems did. Schoolwork and madness busied me. They distracted me from writing.

I graduated cum laude and got a job as a receptionist at a gay magazine. Three months in, the boss fired me. On unemployment, I

experimented with writing again. I felt somehow qualified to write an epic novel.

I put myself on a rigid writing schedule. I wrote hours a day, seven days a week.

I completed a five-hundred-page manuscript. When I printed it, the monster sucked five ink cartridges dry. Publishers from coast to coast rejected my leviathan.

"It's really long," everyone said. Being too big can be a bad thing.

I wrote pygmy pieces. A nice editor to whom I emailed them said, "Let's publish these."

He did.

These days, I'm not so monastic about my writing. Sometimes, writing feels free as finger-painting. Other days, it's as though parts of me are falling off. Words crumble loose and flake. Sentences detach, leprous chunks.

If I wanted to write bigger, harder and longer, what could I take? What would be writing Viagra? My trusted writing potion is coffee and anti-depressants.

I dislike writing about my writing. I dislike writing about my literary achievements more. It feels like bragging. My therapist says I confuse arrogance with modest pride.

OCD roars, "This piece is self-indulgence! You are so bad, Myriam Gurba!"

I think my therapist would disagree.

He'd label my OCD thought a cognitive distortion.

This piece plainly tells what writing is like for me.



# PART ONE:

# FUCKING GAY

## *A Window into my Childhood Bedroom*

Dora the Explorer feverishly humping her pillow to fantasies of Gene Wilder.

## *I Dream*

1. I get a letter telling me I'm going to hell, but first, I have to attend the orientation. It'll be a brunch with a motivational speaker.

2. My right knee is carbonated. I can hear it fizzing.

3. I'm giving birth on a carpeted floor. The father is with me. He's scared. He's fourteen.

## *Arroz Con Pollo*

I will write your aborted baby's name on a grain of rice. \$19.99



## *Spanish Teachers You Might Want To Watch Out For*

Señorita Jones

Señorita Smith

Señorita Kirshenbaum

Señorita Franco

Señorita Pinochet

Señorita Goebbels

Any fucking Puerto Rican. They butcher the language.

### *Disclaimer*

Thank you for printing JUICY across your asshole. We'll avoid it.

### *Observational Humor*

From the neck up, so many socially awkward teens look like signers of the Declaration of Independence.

## *Latin Tempura*

When Dad was little, he thought the song went, "Secret Asian man! Secret Asian man!" America did spawn a secret Asian man. Fred Korematsu, a dude of Japanese descent, refused to be imprisoned in internment camps FDR set up. Korematsu went undercover as a Mexican. He got captured. Sticky rice gave him away. Mexicans don't like rice sticky. Just their weed and balls.

## *My Grandma Told Your Grandma, "I'm Gonna Set Yo Ass On Fire!"*

I have a good grandma and a bitch grandma. Lots of people have a bitch grandma. She looks like a normal old lady, except she's a total cunt. If you don't believe I have a bitch grandma, and you think I'm an exaggerator, consider that my bitch grandma told my sister, when she first got out of the hospital, "You could've used some more time at the Fat Farm." My sister was being treated for anorexia.

*Nothing Good Ever Comes Of Rape. Unless It's Interracial. Because The Best-Looking People Are Interracial. Except For Dominicans. Have You Seen Their Babies? Just Kidding. All Babies Are Fucking Disgusting.*

My friend was coming over, but I had to take a shower, so I left a note on the front door for him: "Come in, Rocky. Rapists, come in a condom." I'm way to trusting. And I actually have been raped. It makes me feel really Bosnian. Or Congolese. Did you know that bestiality is actually animal rape? Zoophilia is consensual intercourse with an animal. But what about when an animal rapes you? That sounds so Yakov Smirnoff. *Giraffe rapes YOU!* Before I got my pet rabbit fixed, he raped me all the time. He was like my dad waiting for my mom to fall asleep, and then bam, I'd feel his tiny paws squeezing my thighs. What do you call it when a swan rapes a woman? Or God rapes a girl right before her quinceañera? I call the latter Christianity. The former, seventh grade required reading.

## *Cheeto Fairy*

Tiny orange footprints across my desk calendar means: She was here.

## *Six Pack*

The abdomen is the wrong place for abs. The forehead is the right place. During Final Jeopardy, contestants' foreheads harden. Rodin's Thinker's forehead defines the word "ripped." People with Down Syndrome have potbellied foreheads, and in lieu of a third eye, some carry a third ab. It likes being tapped. It hardens around strangers. Sometimes it flirts. Abs to abs, aggressive foreheads wrestle.

## *Hostess*

The soul of a Twinkie is delicious and eternal.

## **Fucking Gay**

What did my parents think was going to happen when they bought me that Bernadette Peters action figure?

## **The Mangling of Eloquence**

Rape me silly.  
Do it with string.  
Shave me five.  
Make it look chemo.

## **Bunndy**

I caught my rabbit eating my angora sweater. Fucking cannibal.

**Ways Some Who Love Jesus So Much They Turned Asian  
Have Introduced Themselves To Me, Some Assuming I'm  
Asian, Too**

Hi, I'm Chris Chun.

Hello, I'm Chris Chen.

Do you have a moment to talk about God? I'm Chris Chin. Are  
you?

## **Combo 69**

If pussy flavor betrayed ethnicity, my pinto bean pirogi would  
leave you begging for Tums.

**What is Your Greatest Quality?**

My legs.

## *Pygmalion*

My mother is an exquisite beauty. I am an exquisite replica of her husband.

## *Make Mine a Single*

Double entendres are for pussies.  
Triples are for vaginas.

## *Untitled*

You don't have to eat shit. Just die.



## *Pets I'd like to own*

Alopaca (that's an alpaca with alopecia)

The thing Gregor Samsa turned into when he stopped being human

Zach Galifianakis

## *Amazon Abortion*

A piranha up your pussy.

## *Things That Turn Better When You Add A -ling*

Hasid...Hasidling

Ling...Lingling

Earthling...Earthlingling

Dingaling...Dingalingling

Dingalingling...Dingalinglingling

PART TWO:

BOYFRIEND

## Boyfriend

At after-school daycare, a boy was holding my hand behind a wide pine trunk. We stood on dry needles blanketing its roots. Breeze rustled my bob. I was eleven. The boy was ten. The afternoon smelled outdoorsy. His hand was an oven.

"You look like a girl I saw in my dad's *Hustler*," the boy said. The corner of his lips smiled.

"What's *Hustler*?"

"A magazine."

Pride baked my heart. He compared me to a model.

\*\*\*

While Mom grocery shopped at Food 4 Less, I killed time next door, at Record Outlet. I was browsing by the bathroom when fingers slid into my armpits. They squirmed, tickling.

I twitched, tensed, and spun.

There stood the gangly clerk. He raised his hands and said,

"Whoa, Nelly!"

We stared.

"What's your name?"

"Myriam. You shouldn't stick your hands in people's armpits."

He blinked like whatever. "What are you looking at?"

"The Cure albums."

Sticking two fingers in his mouth, he faked gagging. As he finished retching, he said, "You ought to listen to Donovan."

"That's old folks' music. My dad listens to Donovan."

The clerk squinted. "How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"Oh god," he breathed.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

After talking to him for a half hour, I said, "I have to go meet my mom."

"Buy my band's single."

I stuck my hand in my pocket and touched my lunch money. I was on a diet. "Okay."

I followed him to the front, and while he fished his record from a box, I set my bills on the counter. Tearing my receipt from the register, he grabbed a pen, wrote his number on it, and winked.

Handing me my bag, the clerk smiled. "Call me and tell me what you think of my record. I'm the," he stepped back and strummed a chord of air guitar, "guitar." Against a wall of cassette tapes, his blue-green eyes twinkled. Smile swallowed his lips.

I called him.

On Saturday night, he picked me up and drove us to a Chinese restaurant. We sat at a table, not a booth, and he ordered beef and broccoli, sweet and sour chicken, and chop suey.

"How did you like the record?" he asked.

"I loved it. I've been lying on my bedroom floor listening to it over and over."

The bedroom floor detail I'd prepared during the drive. I thought it sounded seductive, a teenage girl on her carpet, perhaps humping the ground to the bass, getting rug burn.

I monitored his facial expression for betrayal of impure thoughts. His smile and the way he sucked his chopsticks told me he was having them.

After fortune cookies, he drove me home.

Idling halfway up my driveway, in his cold truck, his mouth

swooped at mine. Tongue crashed through my lips. It explored. It was scientific. It took cheek scrapings.

After a month of dates that led to sessions of fingering in his bedroom, I started thinking of the clerk as my boyfriend. He was touchy about that word. He told me, "Don't call me boyfriend. Boyfriend doesn't define what I am to you."

Sitting cross-legged on his bedroom floor, a French novel in my lap that he told me I must read, I always left his house with homework, I asked, "What am I supposed to call you?"

"Lover."

My boyfriend took art classes at community college. For one assignment, he shot black and white pictures of kitchen appliances. Standing at his bedroom desk, tapping a picture of a toaster, he lectured, "Myriam, this style is Warholesque."

"Yeah," I agreed. "What are you going to do for you next assignment? Take some pictures of soup cans?"

He looked up from a close up of a percolator and glared at me. It stung. My heart shrank.

"They're really good pictures," I mumbled and eased onto his bed. I pulled off my socks and stared at my feet. My thumb rubbed my big toe nail's hard cuticle. It dug into the bed and pared. Skin tore loose like a boiled tomato's. Pinching shreds between fingertips, I rolled, sculpting tiny skin pills. Depositing them on the comforter, my hand ran across them, grazing. Death hardened them.

"Hmmm, hmmm, hmmm, hmmm, hmmm," I began humming. It was Beck's song Loser. "Hmmm, hmmm, hmmm, hmmm—"

"Shut up!" snapped my boyfriend. "I can't stand that guy! He's a weirdo. After a show we played in Santa Rosa, I ate spaghetti with him in some backyard."

"That's cool!"

"No it's not. That guy's a freak. No one in the band could talk to him 'cause he was so fucking weird. Not even Steve. And Steve's fucking weird."

Turning, he looked at me. He swaggered towards me. His Pendleton hung unbuttoned. Wounding his bony chest was a tiny pink nipple. It was time to be lovers.

Like Brigitte Bardot, I pouted. Instead of returning the sexiness, disgust curled his upper lip.

"Ugh," he said. "Go take care of that."

My hand swept my dead skin pile onto his wood floor, and I rose. I walked to his bathroom and stood at the porcelain sink. Face leaned towards mirrored medicine cabinet. Index knuckles pressed against my cheek, kneading. Ripe zit splooged across my reflection. It mixed with toothpaste splatter and last week's zit juice. He always made me pop my zits before fingering me. Dabbing the weeping with toilet paper, I padded back to his bedroom.

I shut the door behind me. The roommate was pulling into the driveway.

I walked to him, set bloody two-ply on nightstand, and his hand tugged my hem. He lifted my dress and pulled underwear crotch aside. Two witchy fingers crept up me. The thick silver ring he wore halfway down his middle finger, around his knuckle, rubbed cold.

My cheek throbbed. I moaned. He took that to mean pleasure. It meant my face hurt.

Sliding fingers out, he let my underwear sag back into place. He yanked me to sitting at the edge of his bed. I watched him undo his jeans and pull them and boxers down. Dick sprang free like Murphy bed.

Grabbing my hand, he squirted Jergens onto my palm. He led it to his penis and smashed it there.

"Do me," he groaned.

Remembering not to hum, I pumped. I admired my arm. It was getting muscular from so many vigorous hand jobs. My brain smiled as I remembered the wide Irish freckle at the center of my boyfriend's shaft. It was the type of identifying feature that would've mattered greatly pre-DNA testing. Had my lover been mangled in the workplace of yore, I, as his common-law widow, could've whispered, "Doctor, on his manhood, you will find..."

"My boyfriend's got a huge freckle on his dick!" I told my best friend. In her bedroom, I drew a pencil sketch of his penis. I diagramed exactly where to find his freckle and labeled it, "Dick freckle." I colored his penis peach with her colored pencils. She colored the freckle auburn.

At school at lunch, she and I talked about "the freckle." In the back row of English, she and I whispered about "the freckle." On the phone, she and I giggled about "the freckle." Eventually, "the freckle" became "the herpe." The herpe, became "the herp." His and herps.

One afternoon, riding in his truck to the beach, I was telling my boyfriend ordinary stuff about my day, just the regular stuff a high school day is made of, and he whined, "Myriam, you're always talking about high school. Why do you have to talk so much about high school?"

I stared at him as he drove. Did he really need reminding?

He was dating a high schooler. He'd one-up me about it, too.

"Oh, you're in algebra? I did algebra."

"Oh, you're reading *Hamlet*? Ophelia kills herself."

"Oh, you had an assembly today. Pssh, I remember assemblies."

My senior year, I asked him to rent *Pretty in Pink*. I sat on his futon and rubbed his shoulders as we watched it. Towards the end



of the movie, I asked my boyfriend, "Will you go to my prom with me?"

He shook his head. "I've already been to prom."

I attended stag. In the airport Hilton's ballroom, I sat at a round table eating cold chicken piccata and rice pilaf. A stoner wearing a leisure suit slid a pot brownie into my lap. I tore off its plastic wrap and wolfed the marijuana brick. It was filled with crunch.

I came to in Motel 6. I lay on a twin bed. I looked up at the nightstand. Digital clock numbers glowed noon. I looked down at myself. Instead of blue velvet prom dress, I was wearing a lavender sweat suit. I sat up. My best friend lay belly down on the other twin bed. She was still wearing her white prom dress, white stockings, white pumps, and white rose wrist corsage.

A Richard Pryor movie was on TV. Richard Pryor screamed and she stirred. She jerked and raised her head. She blinked at the clock.

"We have to be at my house by two," she said. "Where's my purse?"

We scanned the room but only saw party wreckage. We slid off the beds and hustled, looking for her purse in the bathroom, the closet, dresser drawers, and under the beds. We found a small fortune's worth of empty beer bottles and cans but no purse. We needed that purse. It held her car keys.

"I'm calling someone for help," I said.

I called a locksmith.

\*\*\*

In college, I let one dude do me. He was half English. The girls in my dorm thought he was our own Hugh Grant. They didn't know

he was half Saudi. I knew because he introduced me to his cousin, Mohammad.

We had sex in his apartment. I never came. I didn't care much for the humping. Since I thought it was more fun to make him laugh, I clowning most of the time we hung out. My purple hair and Mexican moustache I was too feminist to zap made me easy to laugh at.

One night, when we were done fucking, my lover lay on his stomach. I inserted a finger into his asshole.

"Myriam, what are you doing?" he asked.

"Sticking my finger in your butt."

"Take it out!"

"No. Just let me stick it in a little. You'll like it."

"Take it out!"

"No."

His sphincter tightened. "Okay," I said. "Okay, I'll take it out."

He loosened. I slipped out. I sniffed my fingertip. His English-Saudi asshole smelled just like my Polish-Mexican one.

\*\*\*

I really wanted to have sex with a professor so I could say, "I've had sex with a professor."

I've had sex with a professor.

He was a petite Jewish dramaturge with a penile implant. In the alley behind the Lebanese restaurant he took me to for dinner, he lifted up my slip and fingered me. My zits remained as they were, full.

\*\*\*

My brain fell in love with this blonde fag's brain. Our bodies didn't fall in love. We did everything as one but fuck. We shared his bed. It was the bed the fag's dad died in. It smelled of mothballs and dead white man.

The fag and I whispered to each other all night, entertaining each other with ideas we knew we were the only audience on earth capable of appreciating. We purred new Sanrio characters to one another.

"What about the Sanrio Bushtit?"

"How about the Sanrio Dickcissel?"

"Ooh, ooh, how about the Sanrio Chachalaca?"

The fag was majoring in bio. I was majoring in history. Sleeping in that bed with such a smart scientist helped me pass physics.

\*\*\*

The soft-spoken black boy I sat beside in Modern American Lit asked me out. He wore a sweater and Burberry scarf, I wore an ankle-length dress, and he treated me to an Italian dinner in San Francisco. He gave me the most gentlemanly evening I've ever spent with a man not born with a vagina. Eating gelato in a North Beach café, we discussed *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Walking to the train station, we discussed David Lynch's use of music in film.

No sexual tension wound us. This made the date very, very enjoyable.

The next Saturday, I dressed in men's workpants, a wifebeater, and black leather jacket. I stomped across Berkeley to the campus gay dance. At the top of the staircase leading to the ballroom, I spied my suitor. He flitted amidst a crowd of dandies, wearing a

different sweater but the same Burberry scarf. Our eyes met. We froze.

He lifted his scarf and waved its tasseled edge at me. I raised hand, saluting. We smiled, a pair of beards as themselves.

\*\*\*

I met the rich guy at a support group for people with Tourette's. He was the only adult present. Everyone else was kids calling their mothers stinky vaginas and sniffing their fingers. They bugged. They made me never want to have kids or abort quickly.

After group, I gave the rich guy my number and found he lived in the same city as me. He was recovering from crack addiction and writing screenplays. He invited me to his house for coffee, he had his own espresso machine, and over shots, the Touretter told me stories about being chauffeured around Manhattan in a limo to score drugs. His adventures often ended with, "Myriam, I'm not gay but..." and a description of fucking yet another transsexual prostitute.

At his breakfast nook table, we began writing a piece of prose together. It was a Tourettic duet, words flowing back and forth between us, linguistic tics volleying. The thing harmonized our disorders, tic, tic, tic, shit, shit, shit, lick, lick, lick. It grew operatically.

I transcribed it, and we emailed the file back and forth, adding chunks, braiding them in. Fuck you, fuck you, nigger, nigger, nigger! To recite it aloud was cacophonous fun. It made our mouths tingle like Listerine.

The Touretter owned the work of art I've most coveted. It hung in his living room, behind his black leather sofa. Its canvas hosted inept swirls and polka dots. In the corner, its signature read

Haim.

"Who painted that?" I asked.

"Corey."

"Corey Haim?"

"Yeah. He used to be my roommate. The first floor bedroom was his."

I hushed for a little while. I thought of *The Lost Boys* and *License to Drive*. "You own a Haim original?"

"I guess so."

"Mona Lisa," I sang.

About a year into our friendship, the Touretter's kitten, Sprinkles, fell off the roof. Going to take out the trash, the Touretter found Sprinkles crumpled and dead. When Sprinkles' soul left, my friend departed reality, too. He told me, "I see people hiding outside the windows. I hear voices by the trash cans."

To escape persecution, the Touretter moved to Taos, New Mexico.

On Christmas morning, someone rang my doorbell and left. I went to check and found a package on my doormat. I carried the box inside, cut it open, and found a professionally wrapped gift. I tore red ribbon and green paper. I uncovered Hungry Hungry Hippos.

I confided about Hungry Hungry Hippos to the Touretter. I told him that, as a girl, to test the reality of Santa Claus, I mentally wished for the game each December. I figured if Santa existed, he'd read my mind and deliver it. I never wrote the request on my physical Christmas list.

During childhood, Hungry Hungry Hippos never appeared under my tree. However, since the game appeared at my doorstep once I grew into a lesbian woman, Santa does exist. He's a Tourettic her-

mit who occasionally does transsexuals.

\*\*\*

Nowadays, my boyfriend's penis is detachable. I do, however, lie to my students and tell them I used to be married to Mr. Sanchez, the big, hairy tennis coach. I tell them not to ask Mr. Sanchez about it. The breakup was too painful for him.

We were doing a group assignment one morning. It involved eating and getting a buffet of guess, and La Placencia was sitting with Garfinkel, one of her lovers, about random. I noticed I was looking at her with stupid in my eyes. I was not her job at La Placencia to call me out.

"Phylum," replied La Placencia. He looked at me and said Grandma's lady. La Placencia sat down. I was a student. I said, "You don't know what was talking about."

"Yes I do."

"Oh, yeah! What's a condom?"

Deliberately, I answered, "It's like an apartment, or a house."

Garfinkel and she looked at each other and cracked up. It was just like the time they asked me what a blow job was. There was something involved in my answer.

She like this continues happening to me. It's because I'm Polish. On my cousin's side. In college, I enrolled in a class called The Power of the Erotic. We took a field trip to a strip club. I went drunk. Strippers wound up paying me. After I brushed my teeth the next morning, my toothbrush sparkled. Glitter.

A retired actor, Hank Harden, talked to our entire class on career day. He told us how he did gay porn, but now he wanted to work with children. His career trajectory was Ron Jeremy's in

# PART THREE:

## EPIC POLISH FAIL

I confided about Hungry Hungry Hippos to the Tourist. I told him that, as a girl, to me the reality of Santa Claus. I annually wished for the game each December. I figured if Santa existed, he'd read my mind and deliver it. I never wrote the request on my physical Christmas list.

During childhood, Hungry Hungry Hippos never appeared under my tree. However, since the game appeared at my doorstep once I grew into a adult woman, Santa does exist. Here's Tourist's han-



## *Saint Olaf's Revenge*

I'm the Rose Nylund of my friends. I'm Polish on the uptake. The Polish comes from my stepmother's side.

In sixth grade, my teacher mistakenly put me in the advanced group, the sexually advanced. A Mexican girl in it, La Madame, dyed her hair to cover grays. She wore Press-on nails. She graduated from junior high with two kids and three ex-husbands.

We were doing a group assignment one morning, it involved cutting and pasting and a buffet of glues, and La Madame was talking with Garfeel, one of her lovers, about condom use. La Madame noticed I was looking at her with stupid in my eyes, ignorance. It was her job as La Madame to call me out.

"Myriam," rasped La Madame. Her voice sounded like my bitch Grandma's, husky. La Madame set down her pair of left-handed scissors. "You don't know what we're talking about, do you?"

"Yes I do."

"Oh, yeah? What's a condom?"

Defensively, I answered, "It's like an apartment, only bigger."

Garfeel and she looked at each other and cracked up. It was just like the time they asked me what a blow job was. There was breathing involved in my answer.

Shit like this continues happening to me. It's because I'm Polish. On my cousin's side. In college, I enrolled in a class called The Power of the Erotic. We took a field trip to a strip club. I went drunk. Strippers wound up paying me. After I brushed my teeth the next morning, my toothbrush sparkled. Glitter.

A retired actor, Hank Hardon, talked to our erotic class on career day. He told us how he did gay porn, but now he wanted to work with children. His career trajectory was Ron Jeremy's in

reverse. When Hank's presentation opened up to Q&A, one of my classmates asked, "Hank, did you have any boundaries? Are there things you wouldn't do?"

Hank answered, "Water sports."

I thought, "God, who fucks on skis? That sounds dangerous."

Like Hank, I now work with children. I teach history in the public schools. Kids are always trying to pull fast ones on me because I'm small and hairy. I think some confuse me for Ewok. A class clown offered me a piece of gum. I reached for a stick and got electrocuted. I quit teaching about Nixon because I lost them at subpoena. I skip the Punic Wars. When I say Pocahontas, Poke-a-hot-ass boomerangs back.

Occasionally, though, I have a flash of something non-Polish. Occasionally, I think quickly. Once, I was teaching about Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus, and this Indie kid raised his hand, his lips trembled in anticipation, and he asked, "What's gonorrhea?"

I smiled and told him, "Ask your mom. She knows."

## Language Is Make-Believe

A black-sounding Samoan kid I know does a very pomo impression of Borat's Khazak, which is actually a blend of Polish and Hebrew, and I could mimic it for you in Mom's Mexican accent, but I fear I'd turn it into a chimera.

When I'm around a group of people, and some speak Spanish and others don't, I'll have inane conversations in Spanish and once a minute, loudly whisper the non-Spanish speaker's name: "Tamale, tamale, tamale, Jennifer, Taco Bell, Chihuahua sexy Jennifer, bukkake, bukkake, Jennifer's face..."

There's a special name for guys who are attracted to funny women: faggots.

## *Irrigation*

Plumbers have known me with gynecological intimacy. My favorite among them was a color.

"Ye-low!" he cried from outside our apartment door. "Plumber here!"

A clog was the reason I summoned him. I greeted him, noted his trustworthy moustache, and escorted him down our front hall and around the corner, to the problem. He inserted his shiny augur down my toilet drain and proudly, almost cheerfully, snaked a fortnight's worth of tampons.

Pajama-clad, I shadowed him, watching him fist the bowl. His hand delivered a soaked cotton clump as though it was a stillborn seagull.

Like a suitor with an engagement ring, the plumber raised his palm towards me. "Ma'am," he said, poking the mass, "This appears to be feminine product."

A different plumber came to fix our sink when my Mexican hair clogged it. This plumber seemed possibly FTM. His face and nape stretched hairlessly. His shoulders betrayed delicacy. Nary an Adam's apple choked his throat. His voice was Tinkerbell's.

"Could he be a tranny?" I whispered to my girlfriend.

"Shut up," she whispered. My girlfriend is a guy. She's a total fag-got, though.

"Whoa!" shouted the Shetland plumber. I looked up. He was tromping from our kitchen, where he'd grabbed a soda, back to our bathroom. He paused in the living room, staring down at wire dog crate beside the sliding glass door.

"That's a huuuuuge guinea pig!" he squeaked.

"That's a rabbit," I said.

The plumber looked at me. "I'm going to go drink my soda in my car," he said.

We moved out of that apartment so the last plumber who came came to our house. His shirt said Victor. I showed Victor across our saggy wood floor, to the bathroom, and buzzed around the doorway as he snaked our toilet. The toilet didn't cough up anything, but Victor performed a dramatic test flush anyways. We watched the water eddy. Drain slurped with remedial slowness.

"It flushes slowly," Victor pronounced. No der. Victor glanced at our toilet paper roll. "You use the soft stuff?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"That's what's doing it. Same thing happened at my house."

"Well, what should we do?"

"Use less paper."

"But I eat lots of vegetables."

Victor got quiet and pink. I knew the subject that was turning him hotdog.

Focusing on the vanity instead of my face, Victor hurriedly said, "Feminine-products-can-sometimes-cause-this-too."

I looked at our his and hers tampons resting on the toilet tank.

After menopause, perhaps our encounters with plumbers will embarrass them less. That, however, is doubtful. I am mostly Mexican, and as a postmenopausal Mexican, I will grow as hairy as a Yeti. I will shed so much that a furry hyacinth will clog our drains. This hyacinth may become aggressive, a pit bull, and attack plumbers like I've heard feral clumps of hair do at extremely urban swimming pools.

Beware of these feral hair clumps. They're the size of Yorkshire Terriers. They pack the force of the hundreds of angry black and Mexican girls whose hairs they're made of. The gutters they lurk in

belong to swimming pools named after brown and browner: César Chávez and Martin Luther King Jr. The clumps are held together by saliva and babies' urine. The clumps have teeth. This is not an urban legend. It's urban fact. My hairdresser, Deshon, knows a girl with the bite marks to prove it. The Discovery Channel really ought to get these attacks on film. It'd be better than Shark Week.

## Wish You Were Me

I don't write fiction because I'm sick of the lies. I'm sticking to memoir. In memoir, I can tell the truth. I can tell the truth about my modeling days in Milan. I can tell the truth about how I eat yellow cake for every meal but my leggings still fit me like MC Hammer pants. And I'm so tall. I'm always helping the short people I love grab stuff off that shelf in their kitchen cupboards it seems like I'm the only one tall enough to reach. And I can do this kneeling. On the floor. (Go-go gadget arms!) That's how long I am. And my skin is sooo perfect. I don't have pores. I don't sweat. My vagina is made of a plasticky material. They based Barbie's off of mine. I don't tell people that often. You're lucky.



## Teach to the Stars

Two English teachers and a science teacher got together at their friend's, this cute, strawberry blonde English teacher's house. She put *Glitter* in the DVD player and pressed play. The teachers smoked a bowl and watched Mariah Carey sing and dance. They ordered three pizzas and got very high. They graded tests and essays. The English teachers swapped with the science teacher. The science teacher swapped with the English teachers. Even the retarded got A's.

The blonde student teacher stared at his fifth period. An awkward silence grew. An artsy Asian girl with child molester glasses said, "Every time there is an awkward silence, a gay baby is born." This was followed by another awkward silence. And another. And oh so many others...

I have a student named Jesús. He has hemophilia. All I have to do to get him to behave is pick up my hammer.

Teaching in LA County is weird, because sometimes your students are actors, and sometimes you turn on your TV, and somebody who is getting a B in your class is onscreen in your living room, and they look tall, but in real life they're 4' 9", and they are trying to sell you a bucket of fried chicken, and they smile and you've never seen them smile like that in real life, it's a 100% fake smile, and you turn off the TV, but you've got this creepy feeling, because you're sitting on your couch in your thrashed underwear, with your hand down your pants, scratching your privates, cooter dandruff snowing on the couch cushions, and a fourteen-year-old

B student from third period was watching you through the TV and you wonder, "Will she tell, will she tell everyone that teacher has less class than Al Bundy and needs to wash her pussy with Head and Shoulders?" I don't know. But don't tell anyone: Jodie Foster is a lesbian.

## *Rhetorical Questions Inspired by Jeff Foxworthy*

Are you smarter than a fifth grader?  
Are you darker than a paper bag?  
Are you hairier than a hamster?  
Are you harder to get out than ketchup?  
Are you nuttier than a ball sack?  
Are you happier than a chola sucking whip-its?  
Are you sillier than canned string?  
Are you closer than you appear?  
Are you racister than my grandma?  
Are you sadder than a hare-lipped hot chick who missed her plastic surgery appointment?  
Are you weirder than a Culkín?  
Are you sexier than a glass bikini with tinted windows?  
Are you smarter than brain trauma?  
Are you ever going to leave?  
Are you softer than my mother's uterus?  
Are you scarier than my dad skinny dipping?  
Are you better than my brother at cleaning reptile cages?  
Are you better than my sister at not eating?  
Are you better than sex?  
Are you better than chocolate?  
Are you better than death?  
Are we better than me?  
Can I borrow your gun?  
Are you smarter than a fifth grader?

## Squirtle

It makes me sad that only imaginary children live in my balls. My balls are imagined. My ovaries are real. I prefer my balls. They often itch. They hurt when kicked. My ovaries hurt when pussy acne grows on them. That's what I call ovarian cysts.

For an indefinite amount of time, I swam in my father's scrotum. When he was adjusting himself, he was adjusting me. Given that every ball sack holds so much potential human life, I don't understand why people aren't more eager to touch. People constantly approach pregnant women and tattooed people and without asking permission, lay hands. I want to be the first to cup a stranger's balls and say, "Congratulations. I can feel them kicking."

For thirty-three years, I've lived outside my father's crotch. I remain very connected to him, though. I feel connected to all my male ancestors. I visualize ball sack after ball sack after ball sack, each of us living in one another's testes, eventually being shot from cannon and going forth to live our independent lives. I see the scrotums of ancient Slavs, Visigoths, and East Siberian tribesmen, those who trekked the Bering land bridge and became the first Americans. I dwelled in these long ago balls. A subatomic portion of me did.

I, however, will never squirt new life from penile tip. The best I can do is squirt on this page. Squirt.

## Golden Goose

My sister and I were at the wind-up toy store on Melrose, and I thought to myself, "Wow, *that* guy really looks like Kevin Bacon." Then, I realized, the guy standing a few feet away from me was Kevin Bacon. Except, in real life, Kevin Bacon looks like an ethereal version of himself, like those 70s era paintings of white Jesus where he looks like he surfs. Kevin Bacon's skin seemed dusted in the finest gold. His hands busily wound wind-up toys. He set them down and watched them bounce furiously, then with mild vigor, then languor, and then, of course, they froze. The way Kevin Bacon's unreal face observed mechanized chickens flapping their wings and mini-robotic monkeys beating drums wasn't pornographically sexual, but there was definitely a sexual charge in the atmosphere surrounding Kevin Bacon's body. He was wearing a t-shirt with its sleeves cut off, and his upper arms looked succulent enough to bite. Thanksgiving turkey good. Does Kevin Bacon ever actually look like himself? Do any movie stars ever actually look like themselves? Or do they only ever look like themselves onscreen? I wanted to show Kevin Bacon I knew who he was so I started jitterbugging in place, snapping my fingers, and singing, "Loose, footloose, kick off your Sunday shoes..." My sister became a streak jetting out the door. Kevin Bacon's head robotically looked at me. As though some hidden being held a remote control and was changing settings on a TV, Kevin Bacon's glow dulled. He faded closer to human. This curly-haired woman, she must've been his handler, came over, grabbed him by an elbow, and led him out the door. Kevin Bacon walked feebly. Both straggled up the sidewalk. Kevin Bacon's handler paused beside a tree trunk so Kevin Bacon could urinate. As I watched Kevin Bacon shower the tree with piss, his handler slid a dog poop bag out of



## Crooked

My vagina needs braces. But first I'm getting it whitened.

## Epic Polish Fail

My girlfriend and I are in South Dakota, in a rented cabin, lying side by side on an old bed. I'm staring up at the ceiling.

"Look," I whisper, "there's a firefly on the ceiling. He keeps blinking in the same spot."

"Myriam," my girlfriend whispers, "that's the smoke detector."

It took me till I was eulogizing him to realize how fucking cute it would've been to name my Angora rabbit Puff Daddy.

Sylvia Plath was one of my people. That's not how you're supposed to use an oven.



## One-Eyed Not Chick

Daryl Hannah, the fish from *Splash* who in real life lives in a fucking teepee, plays a one-eyed hot chick in *Kill Bill*. In the movie, she's an assassin named Elle, and Elle learns kung fu from a kung fu master, and she pisses him off, so the ancient martial artist rips an eye out of her white girl face. Fuck me if being one-eyed didn't make that bitch hotter. In the movie *Machete*, Michelle Rodriguez plays a human-smuggling hot chick, Shé, who gets an eye shot out by a racist douche bag. Fuck me again if turning one-eyed didn't make her hotter. If fucking ripping out my own eye would improve my self-esteem, I'd do it, I'd dunk my stumpy fingers into my eye socket and evict my eyeball. But I wouldn't be a one-eyed hot chick. I'd just be one-eyed, as in "Hey, you seen that one-eyed chick around?" not "Daaaaaaamn," spelled with eight A's, "you seen that one-eyed bitch on the cover of *Playboy*? Smo-kin'!"

There's this one-eyed boy that I know is in special ed classes, and I always see him eating hot Cheetos in the hallway outside my classroom. He's black, wears a hoodie, and has red fingers from his hot Cheeto powder. I think of him to the tune of the song: "One-eyed, one-horned, flying purple people eater..." I'll bet if you saw this kid, your brain would assign him the same soundtrack. Many people are too polite to find as much mirth in physical handicaps as I do, but a lot of people consider the tic disorder Tourette's Syndrome comedy gold. I have this disease, and it's not a license to mumble purple nigger, purple nigger, purple nigger. There is, however, a lady I know whose tic is to SCREAM purple nigger.

I know a sweet, muffin-topped black girl with Tourette's. She can't help herself; she squawks, "Cracker! Cracker! Cracker!" I think of her as Polly. I like pranks, and sometimes I consider leaving

Saltines on Polly's doorstep, ringing her doorbell, and running. She's too kind to do that to, though. Poor muffin-topped black girl with Tourette's. It's hard being of color in America, and then you add a tic disorder, and you feel like a poster child for euthanasia. Sometimes, on your really bad days, you think, "Adolf, I see where you were coming from..."

I have two eyes. And they're remaining in my head. I need them. When I was using them to watch *Machete*, and I saw it with my elderly parents, it was a Mexplotative bonding experience. I realized the character I most closely resemble is the ex-federale turned vigilante assassin, Machete. Machete is barrel-chested; Myriam is barrel-chested. Machete wears long black hair; Myriam wears long black hair. Machete's face has seen some rough weather; Myriam's face has seen some rough weather. Machete looks like a natural with a leaf blower; Myriam looks like a natural with a leaf blower. Machete don't text; Myriam don't let her students text. I look a ton like Danny Trejo, the dude who plays Machete and has appeared in many movies as Bad Ass Chicano #5, but if someone was going to play me in a movie, the best casting choice would be Gallagher.

## *Impostor*

I would be a better lesbian if I suffered fibromyalgia.  
I would be a better lesbian if I hoarded animals.  
I would be a better lesbian if I collected penises in Mason jars.  
I would be a better lesbian if I drank my own period.  
I would be a better lesbian if I owned sandals.  
I would be a better lesbian if I lifted stomach to wash my pussy.  
I would be a better lesbian if uncles had gangbanged me.  
I would be a better lesbian if I believed in homeopathy.  
I would be a better lesbian if I thought god had nice tits.  
I would be a better lesbian if I fostered retarded children.  
I would be a better lesbian if I was white.  
I would be a better lesbian if I hosted a talk show.  
I would be a better lesbian if I did stand-up.  
I would be a better lesbian if I had clinical depression.  
I would be a better lesbian if my girlfriend wasn't a man.  
I would be a better lesbian if I left cat food on my back porch.  
I would be a better lesbian if I did water aerobics.  
I would be a better lesbian if my teeth were gray.  
I would be a better lesbian if whales gave me boners.  
I would be a better lesbian if I trimmed my nails.  
I would be a better lesbian if I saw cunts in modern art.  
I would be a better lesbian if I quit punching girls in the tits.  
I would be a better lesbian if I unsubscribed to Vogue.  
I would be a better lesbian if I whittled my own cane.  
I would be a better lesbian if cat shit turned me on.  
I would be a better lesbian if I could get this dick out of my head.  
I could be a better lesbian but half-assed is as half ass does, so  
I'll be fifty, just a les, no bian, and never pull this dick from my brain.  
It gently jizzes down my pre-frontal cortex.

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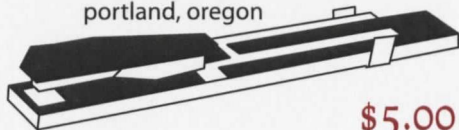
*Wish You Were Me* is Myriam Gurba's bizarre and uproarious follow-up to her award-winning first novella and story collection, *Dahlia Season*. There are some weird and unexplored thought patterns happening here. Gurba is a fierce pioneer in the gooey guts of our emotional and sexual zeitgeist.

"Myriam Gurba just blows me away. Her wit, her perversion, her sharp female smarts, her total fearlessness. I gasp and I gasp as I read her work because I can't believe she said that! It's not shocking, it's a relief. Okay it's a little bit shocking, too. All the best writing makes you come undone a little and Myriam is not afraid to stick her fingernails into your psyche and pull." -Michelle Tea

"*Wish You Were Me* is funny. Achingly funny. Uncomfortably funny, and that's the best kind of funny. It's the kind of humor you'll never forget and it's the kind of book you'll find necessary to subject your friends to." -Mary Van Note

Myriam Gurba lives in Long Beach, California and is the author of *Dahlia Season* (Future Tense/Manic D Press), which won the Edmund White Award for debut fiction. She has toured and performed with Sister Spit and her writing has appeared in anthologies and magazines such as *make/shift* and *Garage*.

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