**Haven’t You Heard**

By Mia Nelson

Every morning I look in the mirror and say *I am a real person*. My roommate Fiona and I call this our daily affirmation. It began last winter when it turned out every boy we’d ever kissed considered us hypothetical. To those fumbling voices in the dark, I am nothing more than the reusable yellow coffee cup I brought to the dining hall combined with the frayed overalls I wear too much to ever wash. I am merely the insinuation of drinking craft beer in a tent after sex. I attract men who use patchouli oil instead of deodorant, men with stick and poke tattoos of the word ‘peace’ on their inner thighs. Fiona’s purple nose stud and semi-ironic embrace of over-the-ear headphones gesture towards a hand job in a bathroom at a punk concert. The men who like her are almost always natural blondes with grocery store black hair dye and heavy eyelids. She is a ‘concert rocker girl’ even though concerts make her anxious. I am a ‘sunshine freckle kombucha girl’ even though I never drink kombucha. In January, Fiona discovered that Rahul, a boy who ghosted me, had a string of hook-ups who looked exactly like me, a long line of blonde Drew Barrymore types in different colored overalls who could have been my sister. Fiona and I came to the realization that we weren’t people, but accessories, or dreams, or archetypes. Since then, I pull Fiona out of bed every morning and we hold hands, digging chalky nails into each other's moist palms. We look at our faces, hers usually still red and puffy with sleep, mine slippery with the hope I get before seven a.m.––the hope that anything might happen, that if I wish for something enough it will be true––and we say *I am a real person* until one of us laughs or one of us cries.

My work-study scholarship comes with the expectation of a seven am shift in the campus archival research library, so I am always out of the door long before Fiona. My mother keeps saying she is so proud of me, that the scholarship is an honor for our family. I don’t have the heart to tell her that they could have just given me the money, that I would have preferred it that way, that my job was meaningless and made it so the only breakfast I had the time to eat was a black coffee and string cheese from the library’s vending machine. The job has only vague instructions to sit at the entrance and ‘keep the peace.’ But no one ever comes into the library. Everyone I know uses google on their phones instead.

I am usually alone with the library’s adult staff, who all have history PhDs and busily try to get students interested in the past. One woman’s whole job is to ‘create content’ from the archives; Dorothy takes the elevator up and down in her monochrome outfits––usually a fuzzy sweater and colorful khakis––to get pictures of our rarest items. We have a hair clip Barbara Streisand wore in *Funny Girl*, an impressive collection of Rudolf the red nosed reindeer statues, Henry Kissinger’s retainer, and the moldy finger of an Egyptian emperor. Next, Dorothy creates captions using dated slang and too many emojis. Once she came over to my desk and asked me to vet a post with a photo of a hand-sized Rudolf with *Low-Key Reindeer Moment!* written underneath. Dorothy looked especially desperate that day so I just smiled and told her I would repost it.

Today, though, Dorothy walks over with her boss. Her face is flushed, like a thousand Rudolph noses. “Zoë!,” she is slightly out of breath when she says this, “Mr. Kusama got word that––” Mr. Kusama, an older, muscular Japanese man graying at the temples, begins to tap his surprisingly portly fingers on the desk.

“Zoë, we feel like your time can be spent more productively. We are happy to say you will be put on a special project in the archives, your hours will remain the same, but now you will have an impact on the future of the library,” he says this like he is listing meat he wants from the butcher. Dorothy smiles at me like I won a teddy bear at a carnival. I smile back at Dorothy and Mr. Kusama puts his hand on my waist to navigate me into the archives.

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I’ve always been an amateur archivist. I keep everything anyone has ever said to me in the notes app on my phone. The therapist I invented for myself in my head––because our college’s *actual* therapist only offers appointments from 2-4pm on Mondays and Thursdays and currently has a waitlist until next year––says that I am a narcissist whose only victim is herself. As an antidote to the way I sometimes convince myself I am the most irredeemable person in the world, I keep a list of all the nice things people say to me. When I feel not real, or ugly, or unlovable, or grey, I look at what other people say about me and I feel better. And like any good archivist, I know my material inside and out. It takes me two scrolls to get to my favorite nice thing: *august 3rd, offered to walk rahul home after kissing to my kissing playlist and he said no because then he’d just want to walk me home and I asked why, and he said I don’t know but he smiled like he did know and the thing he knew was that he could someday love me.* Even though Rahul ended up ghosting me and to this day walks past me in the dining hall like we’ve never met, I love thinking about the alternate universe where we walk each other home for eternity. The best part of my notes app is that it is only the beautiful parts of the past. It's like an Instagram profile, so much prettier and more curated than the anxious archive of and regret that lives in my brain. And considering that I have to consult my calendar app when people ask me how I’ve been doing or what I got up to this weekend, it’s important to have a record. In five years, I might only be able to remember what I wrote––how Rahul’s fingers ran through my hair before he left my house, how it seemed like he liked me so much––and not remember at all the way that he now looks over my head at the omelet station and apparently only hooks up with girls who looks like my clone.

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In the glass room in the center of the archive, there are twenty boxes filled with faded yellow envelopes. A billionaire alumnus had jumped off a building. He made his money on fruit plantations in Central America where his benevolence towards fruit pickers was deemed a weakness back in the boardrooms of his shareholders until it was revealed he had been bribing various despotic presidents for lower tariffs. His last words were to his secretary, *I didn’t mean it*. The alumnus had an impressive collection of Greek bowls, Ronald Reagan for President paraphernalia, and the original diaries of Sally Hemmings’ son. Mr. Kusama calls alumni like this ‘omnivores,’ and they are a big score. Usually, the library inherits sentimental items from the deceased’s college days. The alumnus’ artifacts remind me of scrolling through Instagram, the eclectic mix of accounts I follow that make my feed go *vegan brownie recipe, smutty book recommendation, coup in another country, colorful hiking boots, last speaker of Gaelic dies, cancer free nail polish, abortion clinic in Texas bombed*. His will stipulates that everything be taken in by the collections.

Mr. Kusama’s voice echoes throughout the room but tunnels towards me, “In order to make space for Mr. Bianchi’s generous donation, we will need to clear out some older historical archives. Your job is to choose the most dispensable items from these boxes.”

The boxes in front of me were there because they were not donated. No one would be angry if we dumped them. They were collected when the librarians were in charge of the record, back before they hired Mr. Kusama, who also happens to work for the Charitable Gifts department of the college. Now, times are tough, apparently, and a way to guarantee funds for the college’s ever crumbling infrastructure is to ensure fancy alumni spots in the archives. We are in the alumni appeasement business. We are in the living forever business. We are offering immortality. The possibility of reincarnation as pages a 19-year-old might flip through looking for answers. For this reason, when I come back to the dorm after work, Fiona always says “And how were the catacombs today?”

Mr. Kusama places his hands on my shoulders and gives a quick squeeze. Dorothy beams. It is a marvelous opportunity. They leave me with the files, and I begin to work.

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In my first box, there is just one folder. Inside, it is 1986. The graduating class is the first in college history to have women. Some of them are plaid skirted pragmatists who have successfully acquired rings for spring without the commute that going to Vassar or Wellesley would have entailed. Some are Harvard rejects and took the next best offer without realizing they would be making history, would be at the center of a thousand anonymous op-eds about the derision of higher education via lipstick. And some came to the school with a mission to bring gender equality to the most conservative of the prestigious east coast colleges. Running my finger over the folder, I imagine Fiona and I in that last group, standing soberly in the middle of fraternity basements with signs or loudly being the only women in engineering classes even though in the present we are both Theatre majors. I imagine us as part of the anonymous group of women responsible for the file’s content, a flier in my hands. It is hand drawn, black and white, and obviously a photocopy.

There are four sections on the flier. One of them lists Sigma Alpha Epsilon’s secret song, which impressively stretches an A, B, A, B rhyme scheme with ‘cunt’ and ‘whore’ for three stanzas. Below the song is the name Jennifer along with a description of how she acquired the lyrics by attending a frat party, pretending to go up to a brother’s room, instead escaping through the window with various contraband. The next section is a list of the clubs on campus that were de-facto closed to women. Next is a testimonial from a Black woman named Jean about how when she showed up to the African American Student Association, she and three other women discovered they were given a different time, ushered into the kitchen, and told to cook for the real meeting three hours away. She included the recipe they made. The fourth section is titled ‘Congratulations’ and lists known rapists and what they were doing after graduation. One of the men, Ethan, was headed to Harvard Law. Beneath a photo of him––handsome as a Kennedy, I have to admit––is written *we are sure Ethan will uphold the principles of our illustrious country.* The folder’s tag, which is supposed to have basic information, says that the flier is one copy out of thousands that were anonymously dropped all over campus the morning of graduation, piles and piles of them collecting like snow drifts on the sidewalk. They were taped to every dorm room and glued to every plastic seat set up to watch the class of 1986 walk. Written across the top of the flier in bold sharpie letters is

**HAVEN’T YOU HEARD?**

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After reading, I text Fiona a picture of the flier. She is the president of the Radical Feminists, the vice president of Radical Feminists of Color, and a voting member in the Radical Bisexual Feminists group. She is also in a sorority, but we both pretend she isn’t because she doesn’t want to talk about it. And I don’t mind because I’m lonely too and because she comes home drunk from her formal every semester and tells me about how she had no friends in high school, how she was the only non-white student at her boarding school, how that made her instantly an outsider, inherently political, how isolated she felt for so long, how she wasn’t going to let herself be lonely again just because of her morals. And then she usually vomits.

The vomiting hasn’t happened in a while though, because right now the feminist groups are organizing a body boycott. It was Fiona’s idea, to get as many women as possible to abstain from going into male greek spaces for the semester because there is a case of sexual assault being decided by the committee on student affairs. The victim, Miriam, had lived on Fiona’s freshman floor, and was raped in the bathroom of the math building during a break on her midterm. Though she had posted about it on twitter, gone to the police, and had a rape kit done with a positive match for the accused, her story was having a hard time holding water because she had gone back after the break and finished her exam. The conservative student newspaper refers to her as ‘Midterm Male Manipulator’ on their blog, which is updated nightly and consists mostly of accusatory questions like *If Midterm Male Manipulator was so traumatized, how did she get a 98% on the exam? I wonder if Midterm Male Manipulator was angry that it was just a hook-up? I wonder what other crazy kinks Midterm Male Manipulator has, because obviously she loves a quickie?*

Fiona hearts the text of the poster and sends back instantly, *umm girl boss moment!!!* and then right after *p.s. rat face is studying right next to me…gross.* Rat face is what we call my ex’s new girlfriend. I type, *Should we feel like hypocrites for calling her Rat Face*? Ding. *feminism is supporting women, are you not a woman??* I send the heart emoji and the knife emoji. I say *You are so right it’s not even funny. Remind me what wave of feminism this is?* Fiona sends back, *this is obviously hot girl feminism.* I send *We are post-buy-weed-from women feminism.* Fiona hearts the message and says *gotta go, luv u* and I say *Kiss Rat Face goodbye for me* and Fiona says *you’re the only straight girl I got eyes for and you know it <3* and then after a beat *seriously that flier is fucking great*.

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I walk into Mr. Kusama’s office holding the folder. I tell him that we can get rid of everything except the poster. I show it to him and he shakes his head.

“I thought we already expunged this. Dorothy must have missed one,” he licks his lips and reaches for it. “Zoë. There are some important people’s names slandered in this, people with kids, careers.” I am pretty sure he just means people with money.

I pretend to yawn, saying “Totally, I just thought we could keep it as a reminder of what not to do.” I smile my best I-grew-up-in-suburbia smile. I crinkle my nose in a way I hope means *my dad is a registered republican*. I run my fingers through my hair in a last ditch move that could be called the I-am-too-pretty-to-be-insubordinate. Mr. Kusama nods and tells me he will put it back in the box for disposal. But I say, “No worries,” and pull the folder to my chest. “I forgot my charger in the archive anyway so I can put it back myself,” and then I walk into the glass room, put a blank piece of notebook paper in the box, and slip the poster into my backpack. I do not look behind me when I leave but I feel Mr. Kusama’s eyes on my back like a heat lamp until I turn the corner. Nothing happens. I am a little giddy and a little disappointed. I’m about to ask Fiona where she is when she texts, *student affairs just tweeted that they’re not pressing charges against Miriam’s rapist* and then *come home right now.*

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It is later that day. Fiona and I stand in the copy room of the student center. We are dressed in all black, and we are little stoned on weed we bought from Fiona’s peer tutor Zach, who is a self-proclaimed ‘ethical drug dealer.’ I once asked him what that meant and he said *It means I only sell weed I find, and therefore do not participate in the systemic violence involved in buying drugs in America.* It’s midnight, we are ethically high, and the copier is blinking like a warning, churning out thousands of double-sided fliers. Tomorrow we are going to drop them in huge piles over campus, tape them everywhere. At first, we were going to email it out to the student body with a link to Miriam’s tweets, but Fiona said that more people would pay attention if they couldn’t delete it. On one side is the flier I stole from the archive. On the other side is our update. We used the same sections but overhauled the content. On the top in thick capital letters is Fiona’s handwriting,

**WHY DIDN’T YOU LISTEN?**