Take Her, She's Yours

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I’m still scared that this book will embarrass me, that I am harming my standing in the academic world. In the classroom and in my academic writing, I identify as an antihumanist, someone who questions unitary subjectivity and traditional interpretations of the human condition. I fear the confessional intimate mode of writing in this book will be seen as a reinscription of the subjectivity against which I argue.

When I write in a more academic voice, I attempt to protect myself, trying to prove points through research and quotation. That way, if my reader thinks I am wrong, I am at least at a remove from what I have written. What I see now is that my academic writing is actually fairly personal, all threaded through with implications and intonations and turns of phrase that beg to be admired.

This book is more vulnerable because I don’t need to protect myself so much. I know that “myself” is a proliferation of selves who will say things that I don’t want to say, do things I don’t want to do, be hysterical, be cruel, be stupid, be vulnerable. So I have just written all the selves I could, and present them to you here as a study.

Don’t take them, they’re not yours. But they’re not mine either. I just hold them all.

Georgian Bay

I rent a cottage for me, Imre, and friends to go write for a week. I want to once again see the pink Georgian Bay coastline and slanted trees. None of them have ever been to a house like this, so I am nervous that they will feel trapped and isolated on this remote island. The house itself is from the beginning of the twentieth century, and even though it is a grander version of the shack that David’s family owns, it has the same wooden beams, creaky floors, and flimsy doors.

The second the boat docks I take off my shoes and don’t put them on for the week. My feet shape themselves to the un-
even surface and feel the different temperatures of the striated smooth rock as the sun passes over it. I inhale the sweet smell of the water as I float in its blue expanse. I step gingerly over the rock under which the rattlesnake rattles. My eyes are filled with the colors of the sunrise and sunset.

We cook elaborate meals and drink wine in the evenings. There are mosquitoes that make us scurry for cover as we try to roast marshmallows. And there are cockroaches ("Don’t worry!” I say, “they’re just pine bugs!”) that we find in our suitcases, on our toothbrushes, and even in our beds. But I don’t really notice if anyone minds. I am so happy to be living in that landscape again.

We write. Each of us claims a space on a porch or in an alcove or at a window. I get to the part in my writing where David and I separate. I walk out of the room where Imre and I have been sitting at parallel desks, and go find Catherine, my beautiful friend. I begin to tell her that I am scared to write, and burst into tears. A repository of so much of our history, from the early days at Duke when she would go on hikes with me and David, to the many visits of my boys with her boys, Catherine knows what it is to remember, and what it is to write. She cries with me.

Then she gets up and moves all the furniture so that I can spread the pages out across the floor of the large living room. I sit on it with pens and scissors, and everyone steps carefully around the piles. And I see the shape of the whole book, and know what I will write.

I am in Georgian Bay, a place that holds many memories for me. I am there without David and all the chaos of what we were. I am doing the thing I most want to do — write this book — surrounded by people I love. As I write these lines, I know that they are good enough.