

The
Feminist
EarthMother
PartyGirl

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A word from Joni

I have a keen interest in psychological theories and assessment. They have often been a guide and a comfort when I needed to get clear about a problem.

The theories and assessment instruments described in *The Feminist EarthMother PartyGirl* do not exist beyond the scope of this book. This is a fictional story and to do justice to the journey, fictional assessment tools were necessary.

They were created from an amalgam of my imagination and my understanding of the underlying principles behind a wide variety of psychological theories and assessments. Resemblance to any existing psychological assessment instruments is unintended.

For

Sam

Hip hip hooray!

1

In times of the most catastrophic of catastrophes, the only place one can start is with the known knowns.

But what is known?

Start from scratch, Candice.

1. I'm not a girl. I Am Woman.
2. I'm over the age of eighteen, permitted to vote thanks to the efforts of the suffragettes, well past the years of growing tall and the perils of puberty and ready to pay full fare should I need to take public transport.
3. I'm not a virgin. I've had my heart broken more than once.
4. I live in my own flat with the lease in my own name.
5. I hold down a good job gained after years of slogging away at school and university.
6. I'm not reliant on a man for my future or fortune. I don't go by Miss. I'm not in the least bit interested in getting married. I don't even want to think about pregnancy or child rearing or choosing schools or being somebody's housewife.

I do want it. Someday. Just not now. Except the housewife bit. Is there an agency where you can hire a housewife so you can have all the good bits of marriage and none of the bad?

I digress.

7. I'm happy. I'm healthy. I'm well liked.

I'm a little egocentric, wouldn't you say?

If that was all there was this story wouldn't be very long. You'd think:
That was boring. Inane. Pointless. And not worth the effort I've put in to start it.

Which brings me to the story of my life and where I am at this moment. All those things - boring, pointless, inane and not worth the effort I've put in to start it - unfortunately describe my current situation.

I think back on all the chances that had to happen for me to be here - all the lucky escapes, the miracles, the meetings, the opportunities, the full-term pregnancies that delivered generation after generation so I could exist, typing into my computer keyboard, the technology that was invented, the food industry, the health industry, the laws for equal rights and ... well, paper and ink, and education, all of the absurd, implausible, improbable events that brought me to this point - obviously they'd be for nothing if I'm not going to take my life out for a spin.

Which is not what I've been doing. Step after step, pace after pace, plod after plod with no thought for where I'm heading. I have a job, a flat and a boyfriend ... Whoops, I haven't mentioned him, have I? And he'd pull out his Sad Face if he knew.

My boyfriend of two months (let's call him Gene for privacy's sake, although his real name is Godfrey Channing) is a sweet guy. He has a kind demeanour and a well-paying job and a loyalty unsurpassed by my other boyfriends. I'm hoping he's not The One. Because I'm not ready for The One. I want to experience. I want to know myself and the world, I want to revel in the wonder of being here.

I know what you're thinking. *You should've thought about that before you got yourself a job where they're counting on you, before you took a lease out on your flat and, worst of all, you should've thought of this before you got into a relationship.*

My defence is I didn't. I only know this now because yesterday, during a personal development day at work, the facilitator gave us a personality test.

Which, unfortunately, I failed.

I'm apparently rule-driven rather than creative. A wallflower rather than the life of the party. Brain instead of heart. Reality not ambition. In other words, an introverted, rule-driven pragmatist who lacks emotional dexterity.

I have something important to say here, so listen up.

THIS IS NOT ME!

Anyone who's ever spent time with me knows this isn't a valid description. And now it's plainly apparent I've well and truly misplaced myself.

Last night Gene worked a shift so I was home alone, pacing like a ghost, forgetting to eat dinner, seeking sense in my Self.

Today I need to get back in touch with my emotions. My gut needs to tell me more than just Time to eat. I need to break some rules. Be that lively, vivacious, spirited being of my youth.

Let's face it: school goes on for an interminably long time then is over in an instant. Now my twenties are about to do the same.

There's a Me out there somewhere and I need to find her, to break free from the well-worn road, to strike out anew.

To Liberation!

I'm going to follow my inner voice!

Damn it, there's the doorbell.

2

Gene wants to move in.

“Sure. That would be great,” I tell him. “I need to sublet my flat while I go in search of The Truth.”

He looks at me in that uncomprehending way he has as he stands at my front doorstep. He’s got a dazzlingly handsome face but not a lot goes on under his trendy blonde haircut.

“Sublet? What? Uh, I don’t get it?”

I smile. “I’m going on a journey.” My heart lifts with every word.

His pretty blue eyes reflect the sky. “You’re going on a holiday? I’ll come, too? Sounds like fun?”

As always, he’s unsure of himself. Dear Gene. He’s sweet and compliant and a head turner. Kind of a Trophy Boyfriend. Yep, you’re right: it’s a world gone mad. *She’s talking about him like men used to talk about women, dating him because he looks good without any intention of committing.*

Ah, my first Truth. Women, having complained mightily that our marketability as a partner was based on looks and whether we’d support our men without making a fuss about our own lives, are now free to do the same thing to men. And although I’m glad the score is even, Chaos Theory has romped straight in. Change one little thing and the whole system goes belly-up.

Maybe I wouldn’t be so flustered about the passage of my life if I was married and spending my days proudly keeping my house clean and teaching my daughters how to cook. Maybe I wouldn’t be so freedom-

fixated if my life depended on finding someone to marry me so I wouldn't end up begging or selling my goodies on street corners. Feminism has brought with it freedom, but such liberation has called our lives into question. Now we have a choice: career or motherhood, or career and motherhood. I wonder if things are easier or a whole lot more complex.

Gene is waiting for an answer, his brow furrowing and creasing and bending askew.

"Not a holiday. A journey," I repeat. "Still planning it. I'll get back to you." I step back to close the door.

He holds it open. "Can I come in?" He blinks, his long lashes pathetically attempting to wipe the confusion from his brain.

I push it again. "I'm busy."

He peers past me, holds it open firmly. "Do you have a-a-a visitor?" His lip begins to wobble.

Damn it. He thinks I'm cheating. "Just busy."

"Are you okay?"

Still with the questions. Wasn't I the one who was asking them? What were they again? They flash their grubby hands across my brain and I see instantly only an introvert would push a lover out the door.

Gene leaves half an hour later, satisfied I'm not having an affair, and in other ways, too. On his way out, he's turned his clinical attention to hygiene, and the remnants of our conjugation now lie imprisoned in latex in the bin, where they belong.

I lay in bed alone, thinking about life, my knickers elsewhere, the skirt of my dress upturned against my chest. Boyfriend satisfaction level: well, he's cute, like I said. And out to prove a point today. A tick on my Physical Union Self-Satisfaction Indicator. I have a job I love, a roof over my head, a supportive family, fabulous friends.

And an aching desire to find the truth about Who I Am.

I revise the scant things I remember about Chaos Theory. I started out studying Science to save us from a climate crunch with my amazing physics, but wound up merging into English Lit because, as my mother

says, *Words can be powerful.* Now it seems this wasn't me Following My Heart as I claimed, but instead veering crazily from one road to another. Chaos Theory in applied form.

Again, I digress.

I close my eyes and think of the many paths before me. When I choose one it will change me, which will decide my next path, which will change me again and decide my next path, and so on and so on catapulting me through a giant feedback system into eternity or as close to it as I can humanly get.

Which sounds like a recipe for getting completely lost. In other words, where I am now.

Time to think logically. If I call the present A and my future Z, how many Zs are there? And which Z do I want? And how can I get there, when making a decision may shoot me down entirely the wrong path?

Again, like where I am now.

Perhaps I need a Z Register. Yes! First, I need to consider all my Zs! I jump out of bed and hunt absentmindedly for my knickers while my brain races across the likely outcomes of my life.

Oh, knickers be damned, I need to get this down on paper. Get back to you later.

3

Z Register:

1. Single, CEO of large organisation, marvellous inner-city apartment, regular dinner and drinks with fashionable intellectual friends, a personal trainer and weekend spas to keep me looking fabulous.
2. Single, still working where I am, never doing anything different, middle-age flab, lonely nights over reheated soup I cooked on the weekend to busy myself, catch-ups with friends who haven't made it either.
3. Single professor at posh overseas university where I'm coveted by peers for my interesting accent and off-cultural ways, regular travel to other countries, soaking up ambience and cuisine.
4. Newspaper item in a paper in fifty years: Crazy spinster woman ordered to offload her 250 cats by council. Health inspectors condemn property.
5. School newsletter item in thirty years: We also want to thank this incredible mum for helping in the library for no reward other than her love of books. Now she's retiring, her children long left school. Thank goodness she didn't find anything better to do.
6. Mother, six children each born a year apart, popping them out like it's routine, running a household smoothly and still looking delightful with a cocktail in hand when hubby gets home.

7. Mother of two, cocktail in hand after school drop-off, hubby working so hard he doesn't notice the quiet desolation of my life.

8. Single mother, like Mum once was

Hyperventilate.

Maybe what I'm looking for is not so much where I end up but what I'm looking for. What I'm looking for is: What I'm Looking For!

It's a vision quest. A Vision Quest.

I pace, lost amongst the debris of futures I haven't yet lived. That I don't even want. That I haven't ever aimed for. The future me is already out there, dragging me towards her. I may as well grab myself a bottle of wine, a pizza and several chocolate bars, and wait for her to come get me.

Hyperventilate again.

Maybe I need to *see* who I am. When was the last time I looked at my Self? I always look in my full-length hall mirror to make sure nothing's wrong before I step out, because I once saw a woman walking in a mall with the back of her dress tucked into her tights.

I eagerly skip to my hall mirror. Well! My new yellow-and-white-check cotton sundress is gorgeous! But I'm a little ruffled from Gene. Still without knickers. I swish my dress and settle my hair.

What about my face? Hmm, lips a little dry. I press closer, oh, too close. I see everything, all the good and the bad. And the ugly.

I frown. Ouch, that makes things worse! I manoeuvre my face into something pleasant, focus on each bit. Nice eyes: on the green side of brown. Nose: slightly too stub, but nevertheless manageable. Quite cute really. Eyebrows: ugh, need a pluck! How long have I had that line of extra hairs under the regular arch of my brow? I pull up my fringe and look closely at my forehead. No wrinkles. Not bad for twenty-eight. My hair, straight, fine and blacker than a moonless night, brushes over my shoulders. My legs, long and lean, have a posture of their own making.

I giggle. I still make a good superhero. Actually, this is exactly who I am, a woman whose superpower is wondering. This is the first time

I've looked at myself so intently since I goofed off with silly faces as a kid and practised how to look serious and intelligent as a teenager.

I stand back and evaluate the whole me. I was doing three aerobic jazz classes a week before Gene came along, so I'm in a decent enough shape, not for a model, obviously, but then who is, except for models? I try to make my breasts sit up like the model's beach-ball boobies on the billboard on the way to work, which look like they're suspended by some unknown force, upright and erect against her teeny-weeny-kini.

Further investigation is required. Time to strip completely. Whoa! Naked! The sight makes me quiver. And not in a good way. *Breathe!*

I'm so frail, this delicate patching of muscles and bones and skin. I'm relying on everything to keep working in unison, largely ignored by me, taken for granted, without recognition or acknowledgement. Frightened, I start to cry. I take a deep breath and push my fingers into my neck, expecting to be reassured by my pulse. It's silent. I pinch myself hard on the hip, hoping that I'm still a going concern.

And I am.

So here is *me*, gloriously naked and vividly alive. No trappings. Nothing to lean on. Nothing to shield me from misfortune. I'm at A, and can take this flesh and blood to the Z of my choosing.

But where and what is my Z?

The mirror reveals my knickers sitting on top of the television.

I pull them on, flip on my bra, tug on my dress, slip on my yellow sneakers and head out the door.

I'm off to find my Z.

4

I take off out the flats' driveway and into the street where the heat hangs in the air like a clear fog.

Mrs Feeble's two orange trees are overwhelmed with fruit. Mr Red's azaleas are thriving under his tidy porch. Mrs Snitch's fake turf looks decidedly pale.

Those are not their real names, of course. Mrs Feeble is elderly, so the optimism of her orange trees is appealing. Her son, Ernie (real name) sits with her on her verandah or takes her for a stroll in one contraption or another. His frequent visits hearten me as much as her orange trees.

Mr Red's red-brick house is two houses away from Mrs Feeble's. Everything about him is red apart from his pretty azaleas: his hair, his house, its roof, his car. His skin's also red, because he's a brickie. I often think about popping some sunscreen into his letterbox, but that would make me as judgmental as his neighbour, the disagreeable Mrs Snitch.

Mrs Snitch watches the world through eyes that expect the worst. Any time I've stopped to chat she's begun bitching about this loud party or that untended garden or those kids playing cricket on the road. I always remember an appointment that I'm late for. This happens two minutes in; I never get away this side of fifteen.

I turn left at the corner. The pub looms ahead on the main road, with its tall ochre walls and curious roof ornaments, standing haughtily as if lord of the tiny houses below. I hesitate, realising I don't know

where I'm going. So symbolic of my life. But the pub is where I'm headed, at least for the moment. Hopefully not in life. I set off at a steady trot until I find myself at the corner sign: *Sports Bar*.

Wait, what? Why am I here? I hesitate, my heart booming, confusion running riot in my head. Yet the door sits temptingly in focus. I reach for the ornate handle, slowly, hesitantly, see my hand wrapped around the lever as if I'm holding onto my life, take a calming breath.

Someone jerks the door out of my hands from the other side and abruptly I'm on all fours! An omnipresent hush sweeps through the room, each drinker admiring the knickers now abandoned by my lovely dress, which sits over my head.

I right myself, pull down my dress, sit back on my haunches. "Nothing to see here!"

A hand grabs my arm, pulling me effortlessly to my feet. "Plenty to see, and all of it fabulous."

The owner of the hand is quite delicious. Deep brown eyes that stare unblinkingly into mine. A surprisingly kissable mouth. Taut arms peeking out of a short-sleeve ocean-blue freshly-ironed shirt. Nicely pressed navy trousers. At odds with a bar of t-shirts and tats.

"Thanks." I yank my arm free and stride purposefully to the bar, every eye still upon me, and every brain reverberating with the memory of my knickers. I seem to have been disastrously detoured by a distinct deficiency of direction, a common thread between my life and my Vision Quest. Why am I even here? I've never visited this pub before. My suburb is extremely mediocre and there are much better pubs within a short distance. The tug of my Quest urges me on. I lean on the bar. "Tequila," I growl.

Here's another odd thing: I don't drink tequila, have, in fact, never tried it. Its name popped out of my mouth before I could drag it back in. More of my old science lectures return. Methinks my Vision Quest has invoked Newton's third law of motion: *For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction*.

Currently the Opposite Reactions team is winning.

The barman cocks a bushy eyebrow at me. He bangs a tiny glass onto the bar, pours a viscous, vicious liquid into it. “For you, on the house.” He cocks his eyebrow again.

I decide not to give him a mouthful when he’s been so kind in giving me a mouthful and besides, perhaps it’s a tic and he can’t help it. I turn to see everyone, including HeroMan who helped me up at the door, watching me intently. I hold the glass up. “Cheers!”

“Cheers!” they reply in unison.

My throat explodes as the firestorm hits my tonsils. “Right,” I choke, “That’s done,” as though it was a box to tick on my Vision Quest. Which clearly it wasn’t.

I march to a door that will lead somewhere less male-dominated, although I still have no idea where I’m headed. Or why.

I push the door cautiously this time, making sure there’s nobody on the other side. A large expanse opens before me. I take in the stunning room in astonishment. In one corner there’s a small water feature, in another there’s a wide, lush atrium with sunshine streaming in from a giant skylight. The atmosphere is more congenial than the masculine mood of the sports bar. Appetising aromas fill the air.

The tables are set for dinner. A few laggards from lunch are ordering more wine and more beers and more desserts. Most customers are groups of oldies or couples with varying numbers of children. There’s one large party with a few vacant seats and a balloon that proclaims *21 today!* spiralling lazily above a dainty blonde who looks like she’s still in primary school. Across at the bar must be the absentees from the vacant seats. Young men, foot on the rail, beer in hand, quietly watching a game of soccer on the large screen.

Six men roost in a corner at a curving high table, drinking champagne and eating hot chips. Plenty of Zs there. Maybe here is the Equal Reactions team. I shake my head. Methinks that is hormones calling, the Vision part running roughshod over the Quest. Remember, this isn’t a Husband Quest, but a Quest to locate Me.

Nevertheless, questions must be answered. Why champagne? Red wine and beer are what Men drink, isn't it? And why hot chips? Not Steak or Hamburger? I pause for a short break from my Quest; a dozen eyes eagerly watch me approach. "Hi," I smile. "Is this the right table for The Champagne and Chips Appreciation Society?"

The closest man fetches a bar stool, sets it next to him, pats it.

I sit down as one of the men says, "Our wives (the word stabs me) met when our kids were at kindergarten but we were all going to different schools. They decided to meet Saturdays from one till four. They don't all make it every week but it's a standing commitment."

I grab a small chip and chuck it in my mouth. "So you decided to do it too? Where are the kids? Looking after themselves?"

"Once a month we meet instead of our wives," another continues. "They were always going on about their champagne and chips, so we thought we'd see what all the fuss was about."

"We found it very nice," the guy next to me smiles, as if he finds me very nice too. "Rules are made to be broken, you know?"

I do. But mine are different rules to the one he's implying. My mobile rings. Damn it: Gene. I move away to avoid Gene hearing a cacophony of male voices in the background.

"That was nice," he breathes insipidly.

Ugh. I'm tiring of nice. "What's up?"

"Am I coming around tonight? We didn't make any plans."

Typical. I'm on a Vision Quest and he's asking about a Saturday evening's frivolities. I'm more eager to spend it on My Quest. Ouch: that sounds like introversion. No! Must remember my diagnosis is not the boss of me. "Actually, I could do with a night off."

"Shall I come around about nine-thirty?"

What, just in time for bed? "I mean a night to relax on my own. You know, I can be a bit introverted." The word is acid on my tongue.

"Oh, absolutely you should do that! I'll have a night at the club." He's rubbing his hands in glee, a free man on a free night where he doesn't have to worry about a girlfriend. "I love you," he simpers.

I hang up quickly, turn to find the Chorus of Husbands watching.

“He’s a goner.” The man I was sitting next to pulls me back.

“Planning your wedding yet?” asks the man at the far end.

I laugh. “Hasn’t even entered my mind!”

“Uh-oh,” says a man who hasn’t spoken yet. “That’s the beginning of the end.” He raises his champagne. “Hallelujah.”

The others follow. “Hallelujah!”

The man next to me speaks again. “When a girl finds a man she likes, she starts planning her wedding. If you’re not, I give it a week.”

Yikes! I stand up and brush myself down as I did when I stumbled into the Sports bar. The memory of HeroMan’s hand returns to my elbow. I shut my eyes. I can almost feel his hand upon me.

“Where’ve you been all my life?” asks a warm voice.

Yikes, now the Question has a voice! I open my eyes to find HeroMan standing next to me. “My hero,” I sneer, more to flatten my own fascination than his.

“Don’t be like that.” He steers me away. “Sorry guys, she’s mine.”

“Spoiling our fun,” says the man who was next to me.

“Remember the wedding,” says another.

They all raise their champagnes and smile. “Hallelujah!”
