

[artist's statement: I'm Liz Femiano and I wrote this. I got my MFA in fiction this May and now I'm an editor. I'm at home in Maryland visiting my family, so my friend Wylie Lenz agreed to read this. If you hate it don't blame him, unless his delivery is clearly inferior to the material. I didn't think to title it, though if you really disoriented without one, I'll call it "Monday Night, Five Months Post-Grad School, With Cat."]

My mom would slap me if she knew I'm wearing my last pair of underwear, so I take my laundry to my back porch, where the machines are. My cat normally tries to escape when I go out but she's distracted right now, determined to get milk from my old bedspread. She's got issues, which is why I like her.

While my laundry is going I walk to the street to get my mail. I live in a hip neighborhood, with young people on bikes and bars on the windows. That sums it up. That, and a gigantic flying spider I saw one time at dusk, who flew away into the trees above my bedroom window, and whom I think about often.

Across the street are some hipsters on their porch. One guy has a big, brown beard and I'm confused about whether or not I find this attractive. I know I find some beards nice. For some men beards are essential to their not looking freakish. Wylie, the dude reading this, grew a beard somewhat recently, I think in part to piss off his girlfriend at the time. But I know he genuinely enjoyed his beard, except when he got hummus trapped in it or whatever. It wasn't ironic for him like it is for a lot of guys. Though most scholars agree that beards aren't ironic anymore. I'm excited for something equivalent happening for women, some statement

starting ironic and then becoming really cool and beautiful, but I don't even know what that would be. Unshaved legs? No?

If it's not already obvious, it'll become clear as Wylie reads this that I'm not a very good feminist. My basic grasp of feminism is that you should be able to do your thing, without anything stopping you from being successful and happy and everything you want to be, except your own self-sabotaging flaws. Mostly I'm just uninformed, but my interest is growing. I'm getting there.

The hip people are enjoying their night on the porch, because for them it's not a weeknight, it's just a night. As I walk to the mailbox, I know what they're thinking: "Oh that poor girl, that poor girl without a scene, look at her. She doesn't have a scene!" I know they're thinking this because I've thought it too, and so have you, sitting with your friends on the porch and watching a lost-looking young person stumble by, with sad, sober, forced nonchalance.

I used to have a scene. But the thing about scenes is that if you aren't in the very center, you aren't in it at all, and I got tired of running scared from the periphery, huddling in the middle so I wouldn't feel alone. I got tired, and I was also very bad at it, so I gave up and got an apartment, and a Cuisinart, and a cat.

Her name is Mickey and she has really big nipples, for a cat. Not that that should define her—Does feminism extend to cats? Someone shaved her and tattooed a little "S" on her stomach area, "S" for spayed, or maybe sterile, or maybe... super duper. Insert your own joke here about a shaved cat. I wouldn't know where to start.

I walk back to my place, feigning interest the Popeye's flier addressed to the previous resident. Back on my porch I bend over to pick up the laundry basket. But I'm wearing a miniskirt, and I can't ever, ever, ever bend over in a miniskirt without thinking something is going to happen. I don't know what, but something, like my skirt will split, or a brass instrument will play at the exact moment I bend over, maybe a tuba, so it'll sound like a fart, but a really funny fart. Or a sapphire is going to drop out of me and I'm never going to figure out where it came from. Or the entire night sky is going to rush up into my butt with a *swoop!* like opening a Snapple. Or The Gigantic Flying Spider will fly into my lady bits and nest forever. Or something neutral, like someone I haven't seen since high school is going to run up and start a game of leapfrog with me. Or best case scenario, a man will walk up and pull aside the crotch of my last pair of underwear, grab my hips and then plow into me like the fertile tract of land I sometimes like to think I am. I suspect that admitting this is antifeminist. But if it helps, I can say I don't ever fantasize it's someone bad, only good people, like Paul Newman, rest his soul, or Paul Rudd, or Marky Mark in *The Departed*.

So here I am about to bend over. When I do, I form an acute angle, my ass an apex. I know because I have a picture someone took of me when I was 19 and I passed out bent over the arm of a chair. My ass looks so excellent, it's one of my favorite pictures. I'm unsure if this is antifeminist or not, because I think it's a great picture, but it's not like it's a picture of my research skills, which are also excellent. When I am bent over the laundry basket, I hear what sounds like a man's whistle, slightly muffled. I stand up straight, real quick, offended and intrigued and confused.

Then I hear it again and I realize it's my cat meowing from inside the house. Which is, I realize, the complete opposite of a male whistling at me, as far as sounds and reactions are concerned. My cat meowing for me makes me feel completely shapeless. I could be a bedspread. I feel needed, but more like a beloved post-menopausal nanny than a fertile tract of land.

And I know I keep saying that phrase, but I should clarify that I'm not a fertile tract of land, and I might as well have an S tattooed on my belly. I have Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, which doesn't make it impossible, but—I'm more like a tract of land that isn't always fertile, like it relies on a crop duster who is often hungover and forgets to dust the fields for months at a time. Which is another reason I've been thinking about Feminism lately. I learned that Viagra is covered by healthcare, but my birth control is not, even though I take it for medicinal reasons, no, really, ask my doctor, it's to regulate my hormones and prevent me from growing a mustache, something I'd think even the lawmakers would get behind.

I have a lot of thoughts about feminism that don't go anywhere, or questions that are so big and dumb I can't even begin to form them. It's almost like I have questions about god and need a pastor to hand me some literature. Except I really don't want any flyers about god, so don't give Wylie any to give me, cuz he'll toss that shiz.

I do have a plan, though. I saw a book at Borders called *The Very Short Introduction to Feminism*, and Wylie says he'll shoplift it for me, because one time we were in Borders together and he stole the very short introduction to literary theory, from the same series. They make a book for everything: *The very short*

introduction to Freud and the very short introduction to elitism, and you can really spend a lot of time at that rack, looking at the very short introduction to Scorsese, the very short introduction to loneliness--spinning it round and round, looking for the one that is going to fill in the gaps for you, and make you just the kind of person you always wanted to be.