



*scenes from the lives
of my parents*

PATTIE McCARTHY

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

she said nice hands

he said I know

(& this is how my father met my mother & my mother my father).

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

my father shaved his head in order to write
a letter upon his scalp & waited
(for his hair to regrow)—whereupon
he set off for my mother & there shaved
his head again to reveal the message.
this was a period of history that tolerated
a certain lack of urgency.

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

on your way to the mess hall a truck
will pull up with instructions to take
you to the dentist—do not ask questions—
you are not going to the dentist—once
you've arrived you will take the test
& find your own way back to base—this
will be s.o.p.—someone will
come to take you to the dentist.

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

she said

I whas & ys & ever schell

be youwre awne true

bedewomen tyll I die.

[the same wife to her husband]

I rest your loving constant wif tel death

your letters er⁴ very short.

he said

what soever I sayd, it was before

your face. I doe not waygh it a straw.

tho shalt see that the clothes I

weare is not borrowed; you know

it is not your petticote.

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

when presented with the word puzzles

LO _ AL & THR _ _ T men were more

likely to complete the puzzles with neutral

words like LOCAL & THROAT but women

were more likely to choose LOYAL & THREAT.

this breakthrough on the cryptographic

systems was accomplished entirely through

sweat-of-the-brow analysis without

the aid of any captured codebooks.

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

shibboleth

(& this is how my father met my mother & my mother my father).

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

she was coming back from a break—two agents
were standing at her desk—a telegram
had arrived at home—when they reached
her house she saw her father
in the door & she sank to her knees in the front yard.

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

my mother asked the midwife to place
a special stone under her head & give
her a potion—in part of the finger,
toe, & knee-joints of corpses—to ease
her birth pangs (perhaps an alteration of *prong*).
a piece of flexible
material forming the hinge. she was ordered
burned alive. the midwife was also executed.
[I doubt the authorship of this book.]

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

they met in the first Voynich study group (1944–46) in which text was transliterated & machined—at least 48,000 characters (or 1663 thirty-character lines). the results & any report of analytic studies have disappeared from the file, if they ever existed. subsequent students have had to repeat, over & over again, all the work of transcription & machine preparation, as if it had never been done by others. as if it had never been.

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

she said I love you

he said thank you

she said nie, dziękuję

he said nyet, do svidaniya

(& this is how my father met my mother & my mother my father).

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

she said to whom do you speak this?

he said do you see nothing there?

she said nothing at all; yet all that is I see

he said nor did you nothing hear?

she said no, nothing but ourselves

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

Shakespeare makes the closet scene more dramatic by including the appearance of the ghost and the fact that Gertrude cannot see it. the ghost's appearance results in different reactions between Hamlet and Gertrude. the interesting part is that Gertrude cannot see the ghost in account of her being sinful and at this part she feels convinced that Hamlet is mad. Hamlet on the other hand gets confused at why she cannot hear or see the ghost. Shakespeare arouses interest in the audience by making the ghost appear at that particular point. the death of Polonius is also an attempt by Shakespeare to enhance the plot. how to cite this page MLA citation:

“Free Essays–Act 3 Scene 4 of Hamlet.” 123HelpMe.com. 09 Mar 2012
<<http://www.123HelpMe.com/view.asp?id=14579>>.

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

& boy meets girl—he is a lifeguard—she is reading
about the wreck of the *Andrea Doria*—as they
say in the army—it's a counter-
intelligence lovestory—this information may be
given in cipher—this information may be made
available on microfiche—tabula recta.

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

libel & the matter

now infamously

reckoning

[statistically improbable phrases] 'buttery book'

& bills he could not possibly pay (learn more)

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

when I was six I played by myself & drank
powdered milk—and I liked it.

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

palimpsest

(& this is how my father met my mother & my mother my father).

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

they arrived on the SS Willehad in Fells Point, Baltimore on 4/11/07. the names of their parents are unknown. an unnamed cousin and their children's uncle, also unnamed, purchased their passage. in the 1910 census, the family was living at 721 South Broadway in Baltimore, which appeared to be a large boarding house. she could not speak, read, or write English but all the others could. Johan, now listed as John, registered for the draft listing his d.o.b. as 2/11/77, his citizenship as German Poland. they were working as laborers in a postery and he worked as a laborer in a box factory. in the 1930 census, she was now a widow. all of the sons were single. she still knew no English but all the others did. he died shoveling snow on Palm Sunday, 1942. he drove a yellow cab for many years and had a fatal heart attack when he was robbed by an unknown assailant at the intersection of Fayette and St. Paul Streets. he changed his surname by court order in 1954. here, fill in your father's date of death here.

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

cutrains swell from windows & fill
the room with naptime yellow light.
which church is ringing the Angelus.

PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS AREA.

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

he was dressed like a smurf (it made the protest
songs less funereal) & she sang

boiling water bubbling tar

smurfs will be frying everywhere

& she held a blank protest sign (now

it's stock photo) & they

took two steps in place, one step forward, raised
the left leg to one side & then the right to the other

(*& this is how my father met my mother & my mother my father*).

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

secondly, that the body, taking in the shoulders, makes still a more oblong figure, crossing that of the head; so that supposing the woman on her back, the head coming into the world, is a kind of elipsis [sic] [stet] in a vertical position. similar rules applied for the wearing of hats or bonnets. as the mourning progressed, so the hats and bonnets became more trimmed and fancy, whilst veils became shorter until they were eventually removed altogether.

***scenes from the lives of my parents:**

they were old school—messages

sent by shortwave burst transmission or in invisible ink.

they couldn't have been spies, the neighbor said.

look what she did with the hydrangeas.

they last exchanged long glances when they brushed past
each other on the tarmac of Vienna's international airport.

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Cover illustration

From the *Voynich Manuscript*, a “scientific or magical text in an unidentified language, in cipher,” carbon-dated to the 15th Century, with color botanical and astrological illustrations throughout. Held at the Benecke Rare Book and Library Manuscript at Yale. For more information, see: <<http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3519597>>

Pattie McCarthy's most recent book is [*Quiet Book*](#), published in 2016 from Apogee Press. She is also the author of *Nulls*, *Marybones*, *bk of (h)rs*, Verso, and *Table Alphabetical of Hard Words*. Her chapbook *L&O* was published in 2011 by Little Red Leaves. A 2011 Pew Fellow in the Arts, she teaches literature and creative writing at Temple University.

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