

I once co-owned a bookstore. Could buy and sell whatever I wanted. Read books all day long. Had customers who loved me, whom I loved. Held readings for local authors on Thursday nights. Made hot chocolate, spiced apple cider, blueberry muffins from scratch. Had a niche I thought filled nicely. But things happen, and things happen with you want them to or expect them. What they do is not as important as the fact that they just do. We are able to make do, make a new niche for ourselves. We are lucky to find compatible folks to accompany us on the journey. They may very well disappear, and if we are able, we'll rise up, find others, make do, make a new life for ourselves. We are able to make do, make a new niche for ourselves. We are lucky to find compatible folks to accompany us on the journey. They may very well disappear, and if we are able, we'll rise up, find others, make do, make a new life for ourselves.

PROUS REBEL

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SAMPLE CHAPTER

2

FRIDAY

11-15-19

PUSHPINS AND POWER STRIP IN HAND, Lisa arrived downtown the next morning after stopping at McDonald's for two sausage burritos and a large orange juice. The parking spot just outside her window she had looked forward to capturing was not available at 7:57. She breathed deeply, not a big deal, there were others. The deep breathing was not new, but had been long forgotten these past few years. Disappointment had chiseled its way into her life, had successfully disengaged the breathing, the quiet depth it had once helped her achieve. While she was now hunting for something new, she was also hoping to retrieve some of the old, some of the way-back stuff that had helped to create her power, establish her presence.

Inside the office, music was already disrupting her need for silence, lyrics working their way into one ear, melody the other. She stuck pages onto the walls, varied the color of pushpin depending on the content of the pages. After plugging in her laptop and phone, she slipped the Bose headphones over her ears. The chatter was still loud. She switched to the Beats Solo. A little better, but not much. The check she had written yesterday for \$618.35 covered the prorated rent for the rest of November

and her obligation through December 31. Her savings account would handle rent for a couple months, long enough to help her focus, figure some things out, a fresh place with life and traffic and orchids walking by. But disappointment was creeping in, finding an entrance when she took a bite of the sausage burrito. She had never eaten anything from McDonald's, not even an offered French fry. At least forty-five more days in this office, this place she was hoping would be the catapult to spring her forward into a new life.

The journal she had purchased online from the handmade-book artist she found in Chicago was sitting on the desk. It was laced with literary quotations throughout. She had trusted the book artist to use her own judgment, include ideas she thought might inspire her. Lisa hadn't opened it yet, hadn't read any of the quotations, authors' names, looked at any of the books mentioned. She didn't know the woman whose image graced the cover. She flipped it open, read the dedication on the inside:

*For Murasaki Shikibu, who opened a door for women
authors over one thousand years ago.*

From a zippered flap of her pack, she removed an Ohto Graphic Liner pen with pigment ink, removed the cap and touched the nib to the Somerset Book paper the book artist had used to make the journal. She didn't move her wrist into a cursive flow, wasn't ready yet, instead watched as what started as a small mark spread into a pea-sized circle, soaked through the page to the back side. She attached eight legs, grew it into a spider, and finally touched fingers to keyboard:

This black widow from nowhere appears simply because it chooses to, takes its form from accident, from a resistance to move forward, from an expanding disappointment that began at birth and continues through the creation of these sentences, having nothing of value to say, to think about, to share with anything except a one-dimensional spider that won't even expose her deadly red dot.

She noticed as she typed, in the silence after periods and commas, that a jackhammer had been pounding at concrete somewhere up the

street. She hadn't heard it when it was pen on paper, had allowed the noises of the city to inhabit their natural space, had let go of the me-first behavior that had had its claws at her throat for so long. Her ears hurt, like a boxer who had sparred for days in a row. She removed the headphones, the jackhammer blasted louder, the volume of the music bounced off walls, the conversations amped up. She looked at her reflection in the mirror on the back of her door, ears puffy and red. But the rest of her looked relatively good. Her whole life folks had told her she looked younger than her age. It was still true at thirty-seven. The auburn waves of hair flowing over her back and shoulders. The long sinewy body, strong cheekbones, not inherited from her five-foot-one mother. The coaches at Piedmont High had recruited her to play volleyball, hounded her for the better part of her sophomore year. But she was a reader. Didn't have time for the serious practice required to become a star. They told her it didn't matter. She was a natural. But she had been in the middle of *War and Peace*, had just started with *Infinite Jest*, had a dozen other thousand-page tomes lined up for her spare time.

Lisa took her hand off the keyboard, held it in front of her eyes, rolled it from the back to the palm. She remembered holding it up to her mother's hand as a young girl, her twelve-year-old fingers dwarfing those of her mom. Alice had never given her information about the other half of her DNA, simply said her father could have been any one of five friends who had helped her out. She didn't give her the full turkey baster explanation until she was older. Alice had taken Lisa and her adopted sister, Cody, to see the world premiere of Sam Shephard's *The Late Henry Moss* at the Theater on the Square in San Francisco in November 2000. For two seventeen-year-old girls, seeing Nick Nolte, Woody Harrelson, Cheech Marin, and Sean Penn on the same stage would have been enough to satisfy them for months. But for Lisa, the added attraction occurred when Sam Shephard entered the theater from the stage, waved at the cheering audience, walked up the stairs, and sat in the empty seat next to her. For two hours, Lisa was not able to look at the stage, her eyes trained on Sam's hands, hands that were identical to hers. Could her mother have hooked up with Sam Shephard eighteen years ago? He was a mainstay at the Magic Theater back in the '80s, and her mom was a theater groupie.

It was on the trip home over the Bay Bridge when Lisa said, “I think Sam Shephard’s my father,” that her surrogate sister Cody had laughed uncontrollably, that Alice had smiled and said, “Five of my male friends came over one night and filled a turkey baster for me. They are all long gone. You will never know your father.” Lisa ignored them. She had seen Sam’s hands.

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The content of the dialogue in the outer office pounded into her head over the open ceiling.

“Hey. This is Bianca over at the property management office. Did you find a bag of wet clothes at 108 Pine?”

Lisa heard the other voice on speaker phone, didn’t know who was talking.

“I did,” the male voice rang in.

“Yeah. We got a call about it. The former tenant left it in the washer. Hasn’t been seen in days.”

“I’ll pick it up when I go back. What should I do with it? Toss it?”

“No. We’d probably be liable. Let me get back to you.”

Under her spider picture and words Lisa drew a line down the middle of the page. She labeled the left side “Disappointments,” the right side “Accomplishments.” Under Disappointments she wrote “Making too quick a decision about this office.” Across from it under Accomplishments she wrote “Finding this office.” Another Disappointment was “Eating at McDonald’s.” She added, “Remember to eat something at home for breakfast.” Another Disappointment: “The loudness of the office noise.” Its counterpart was “Learning something about property management.” This activity reminded her that her whole life had been lived out in a series of paired beliefs that opposed each other, sitting on the middle of a fence, “Yes, but” as a constant mantra.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jory Post is an educator, writer, and artist who lives in Santa Cruz, California. He and his wife, Karen Wallace, create handmade books and art together as JoKa Press.

Jory is the co-founder and publisher of *phren-z*, an online literary quarterly. His first book of prose poetry, *The Extra Year*, was published by Anaphora Literary Press in 2019, and was followed by a second, *Of Two Minds*, in 2020.

His work has been published in *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Rumble Fish Quarterly*, *The Sun*, and elsewhere. His short stories “Sweet Jesus” and “Hunt and Gather” were nominated for the 2019 Pushcart Prize.

After her partner dies suddenly, Lisa Hardrock realizes how little she knows about the life she's been living.

As she confronts the secrets and unpaid debts her partner left behind, Lisa also begins to investigate the mysteries of her own life by beginning to write. Begun as a journal for her daily thoughts, her blog ends up going viral.

Along the way, Lisa discovers the truths and lies about those she has considered friends, learns more about Central Valley motorcycle gangs than she ever thought she needed to know, and unexpectedly ends up with a pantry full of sockeye salmon for her cat, Eloise.

Praise for *Pious Rebel*

“Life and art, process and product, are inextricable for Jory Post. The stories he tells are simultaneously rooted in great specificity and engaged with the processes of storytelling: with the surprises of memory and invention, with the ways in which art is made and shared, and with the dynamics of communities in which art flourishes. He’s happening, and his art is happening — it’s exciting work.”

Jonathan Franzen

“*Pious Rebel* follows the education of Lisa Hardrock, a woman who knows everything and nothing about the people in her life. It’s a brilliant novel of reckoning, joyous and sinister, showcasing Post’s genius at depicting the material of existence, the exquisite quality of every living day.”

Elizabeth McKenzie