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## Hurricane Girls

Kallie Comardelle

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*Hurricane Girls*

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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Submitted to the LSU Roger Hadfield Ogden Honors College in partial fulfillment of  
the Upper Division Honors Program.

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Louisiana State University  
& Agricultural and Mechanical College  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

# Hurricane Girls

## Preface

There are so many things that I want to say about this project. I want to start by saying I started out on this journey of creating this collection just knowing that I didn't want to write love poems. I felt like men and romance had dominated my life for so long, I actively wanted to work against giving romantic relationships with men space in my work. I think I accomplished that somewhat, although there are several pieces in here that speak on themes of sex and relationships. Knowing that I didn't want to talk about men, I turned to my family. And I decided that I was going to do my whole thesis talking about my family. It was hard to think outside of the binary that there exist my relationships with men, and then my relationships with family members. I discovered it with one of these poems speaking on a relationship between a student and a teacher. But as I dug more and more into talking about family, I found I specifically had a lot to say about the role of the mother. And so, you will find, most of these poems focus on the mother daughter relationship.

There is so much I want to say about mothers and daughters, mothering and daughtering. A lot of who I am as a person is because of where I was raised, Louisiana. I was born here, I was raised here, both my parents went to school here, my dad was born and raised here, and I definitely wanted to pay homage to that aspect of who I am as a person, and what role the environment plays in the mother daughter dynamic. Most of the feelings that influence the creations of these poems only occurred to me within the last two or so years. I am 21 years old and I am in my senior year attending LSU undergrad. My mom and dad conceived me when they were both 20, on LSU's campus (or on the outskirts of campus depending on who you ask). And this notion of living the life my parents lived when they had me, of walking the places they walked, of worrying their worries, really made me think about my feelings and opinions, especially regarding my mother. Walking around as a 21-year-old woman, I have no idea what I would do if I got pregnant. I wouldn't know the first thing about raising a child, much less birthing one. I can't even make my own doctors' appointments. I started to feel real sympathy for my mother having me so young, sympathy for her and for her past self, and the life she could have lived if I hadn't interrupted it. This collection is heavily informed by this sympathy, and by life echoing from mother to daughter.

I would like to thank Professor Francisco for all of his help on this project. I would honestly be lost without him, and this draft would definitely have at least a hundred more commas and typos without him. My literature side *loves* the oxford comma. I would also like to thank my parents, especially my mom. I wouldn't have been able to create these poems without her. I hope she never reads this.

For your consideration (and hopefully enjoyment),

Kallie Comardelle

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## **Driving Lessons**

The first driving lesson my mom gave me was how to lock my doors.

We practiced getting in and out of the car a dozen times over.

Hit unlock.

Open driver door.

Hit lock.

Get in.

Hit lock again.

Buckle up.

Never buckle up until you're in the car, all your doors are locked,

And you've checked the back seat.

Don't forget, check the back seat first.

Check.

Unlock.

Open.

Lock.

Lock again.

Buckle.

She drove me to a gas station, taught me proper gas station etiquette,

Which was different than parking lot etiquette.

Park.

Turn off your car.

Open your door.

Lock the car.

Pop the gas tank.

Get out the car, lock it again.

Always stand facing outwards.

Look neutral.

Be alert.

My mom told me that I had a “kidnap-me” smile.

She said to not ever smile at strangers,

because my smile was just too nice.

She could smile though.

She had a “don’t-fuck-with-me” smile.

A “I grew up in Livingston parish” smile.

She had a smile that said I dare you.

Don’t smile she taught me.

Be neutral.

There are men out there who want to hurt you she said.

Always lock your doors.

Never smile.

And if one of those men get into your car with you,

Kill yourself.

Make it messy.

She said that if a strange man was ever to get in my car with me,

I was to crash it.

She made me promise.

I did.

She said that people love watching disasters happen.

She said make a scene.

Drive into a building,

Or a tree,

Or another car.

Whatever you do,

*make people watch.*

## **Hope**

*(Dedicated to Dr. Chris Barrett)*

Last semester I had a professor who ended our last class by saying:

“Hope is a civic duty. It is your duty, as a citizen of the world, to have hope.”

That line really stuck with me, and I think the reason why it stuck with me is because I know that I will let  
my professor down.

Hope means that the people who are destroying our environment can learn to value the earth we live on  
over money.

Hope means that my mom can learn to love her body.

Hope means that the men who have assaulted me can learn that what they did was wrong.

Hope means, ultimately, forgiveness.

And I am not ready to forgive.



## **Childhood Aspirations**

I'm not sure if I had any aspirations as a child. I remember imagining what the future would be like, but in the future the only thing I knew about myself was that I existed. Which I guess makes sense for how I feel now, because now my only aspiration is to be happy, and I guess to be happy you have to exist. I think my past self would say that I set the bar too low for my expectations in life, and I would then tell my past self to fuck off, which I know you shouldn't say to children, so I'd probably tell them something along the lines of you have no idea what I've been through to cause my bar for life to be set so low, and then I imagine my past self would call me a wimp. How cliché, "you don't know what I've been through" and how rude to say that to a child who will then experience the exact instances that I'm referencing. I guess a kinder thing to say would be prepare yourself, things are going to happen that are hard, but nothing will happen that you won't live through. And at the end of it all, that's all you need to know about yourself, is that you live through everything you've ever experienced, and maybe that's why your standard is simply to exist, and as a bonus, to exist happily.

How pretentious.

## **I Ruined Christmas**

Its fall, I'm in middle school, and I know this because I'm old enough  
To be left home alone after school.

We live in a trailer park, at the end of the road, and I'm one of the last  
Kids to get off the bus, which I'm grateful for.

I go inside, and there, in the living room: pile of presents,  
Gift-wrapping supplies, and next to them is a paper  
"BUDGET \$300"

And I know how short we are on money.  
So, I wait for her to get home,  
And I tell her that I don't need her to spend \$300 on me for Christmas.  
She asks how could I?

And I'm confused because she left it out in the open,  
and I thought I was mature enough to know these things.  
And she says that I don't know anything, and that I need to mind my business.  
And she tells me I ruined Christmas.

I cry, because I love Christmas, and I love her.

She doesn't remember this.

## **Role Play**

I am

Dad's best friend.

Mom's daughter.

## **I Am A Misogynist**

There are many things that I  
Don't like about myself.  
Like my dry elbows, or the fact that  
I cannot forgive women but effortlessly forgive every man.

Before he has even opened his mouth to apologize,  
I have forgiven him.

I don't know when I'll be able to give the same grace to my mom,  
Or my ex best friend,  
Or myself.

Maybe one day I'll be less differential,  
Less devoted,  
Less desperate.

Maybe one day I'll remember to put lotion on my elbows.  
Maybe one day I'll be able to hate men.

Maybe one day I'll be able to forgive the women in my life.

**Everything my mom has ever taught me:**

1. Mother knows best.
2. Always keep your car doors locked.
3. Drugs will age you.
4. Cigarette smoke stinks.
5. Don't leave your tampon in for longer than five hours.
6. Mom knows best.
7. Never be financially dependent on a man.
8. Always look presentable.
9. You'll never win an argument by yelling.
10. Endurance is everything.
11. Beauty is pain.
12. Watch, Listen.
13. Country music by women is good.
14. Country music by men is bad.
15. It's easier to get caught speeding on a back road.
16. Trust your gut.
17. Trust your mother.
18. Being pretty is a skill.
19. Sex is a weapon that will be used against you.
20. White wine is for women, red is for men.
21. I know you better than anyone else.

**Dear Cousin,**

I was sitting with grandma in her garden yesterday, and we had taken to talking about you and I and us and all of our adventures when we were still small enough to be best friends, and the world was only as big as the car ride from our houses to grandma's house, and you would not believe what happened! As we were talking, grandma mentioned the trailer park that she and grandpa used to live in and as she said it, I saw a flicker of shame in her eye, and I know she didn't want me to see it or she didn't believe me capable of seeing it, as I didn't believe her capable of feeling it but shame nonetheless. Can you believe it? She felt shameful at the mention of one of the staple locations of our childhood. We slept together in her trailer, sharing the kitchen table that turned into a bed, and we went easter egg hunting with the other kids in the park and we slept there and woke up there at 5am for our 12-hour trips to Disney world, and I learned how to swim in the neighborhood pool, and I watched you learn how to ride your bike up and down the street and we fed the swans in the lake bread from her pantry and she thinks back on that place with shame? I could not comfort her because I was too caught up in realizing that grandparents could feel an emotion like shame, and too caught up in the fact that she did not share in our childhood memories filled with love, and she was too caught up in tending to her garden and pretending not to feel shame and I realized that maybe us moving away from home wasn't growing up. Come to think of it, I haven't felt grown up a day in my life until yesterday. Until I realized that grandma is human and that she feels shame, and that our childhood memories were not her memories and that that place that we loved so much, grandma's house, was just her house and that she is getting old. Dear Cousin, please come visit. Grandma and I miss you.

## **My Sister's Mother**

My sister will never know my mother who was cheated on.

My sister knows a happily married mother.

She will never know two for one daiquiri Tuesdays,

And dominos pizza's that had to last a week.

My sister will never know the gravel of a trailer park road,

Or the feeling of being ashamed of where you live.

My sister will never know the 25-year-old who brought me to my first day of kindergarten,

And my sister will never know the mother who all of my friend's mothers' thought was too young.

My sister knows a happily married mother.

A mother whose car won't be repossessed.

A mother who doesn't simply survive the week,

but lives it.

My sister does not know my mother. And she never will.

I live now with two versions of my mother,

the one from my childhood,

and the one from my sister's childhood,

and I know that these two strangers will not raise the same daughter.

## **Happy Birthday(s)**

My mother had me when she was 20  
and now, at age 21, I grow up  
watching myself grow up.  
This year, on my birthday,  
I would've been one year old.  
Probably walking, and babbling  
About something. I'm not sure.  
But I would've been one year old  
And I picture myself with a one-year-old  
And I can't imagine it.  
Last year, on my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday,  
I imagined giving birth. How horrible  
And horrific and gruesome.  
Each year it becomes easier and  
Easier to sympathize with my mother.  
I was raised by a 20-year-old who was raised  
By a 16-year-old, and I wonder how long  
After giving birth to me, it took for my mother  
To stop ascribing her faults to her mother.  
I don't think I am ready yet. Is that what  
Having a child means? Taking ownership  
For the terrible parts of yourself?  
I still blame my mother.  
When I have a child, can I no longer blame her?  
The faults become my own to pass down.  
I'm not ready yet.



## **Back Alley Walmart Parking Lots**

It's sometime in spring, and its sometime in middle school.  
I don't remember the exact day or time, but I remember  
That the air was still cool enough to not be summer, and I remember  
My back pack, and the school uniform I was wearing.

She comes into my room, and tells me that she needs  
To run to Walmart. She'll be right back; she just needs to get some groceries.  
I'm in charge until she gets back, of little brother. He's five years younger than me.  
Dad will be home in a little while.

Dad gets home, and he comes into my room and he closes the door.  
And he says pack a bag and get dressed. We're going to the hospitable.  
And I say why and he says that mom didn't go to Walmart.  
She drove herself to the hospitable.

She was pregnant.  
The pregnancy was ectopic.  
Her fallopian tube burst,  
and she was going to die.

Except she wasn't going to die because she drove herself to the hospitable.  
He waits for me to finish crying, because I'm crying,  
And he helps me fix my face so I don't look like I'm crying,  
Because I'm 11 and brother is 6 and I'm in charge and I can't be crying.

I learn a lot about my own anatomy that day.  
I learn what a fallopian tube is, and what an ectopic pregnancy is.  
I learn that it can happen to anybody.  
I learn that my mom almost died.

She doesn't know how much that day affected me.  
She doesn't know that I started hating hospitals that day.  
She doesn't know that I won't give her grandchildren because of that day.  
She doesn't know that I hold this day against her.

She doesn't know that when she preaches to me about being prolife,  
I hold this day against her. That I silently ask her why she didn't choose death.  
She doesn't know that I hate her for this day.  
She doesn't know that I remember.

## **Reloving**

I feel I am doomed to relive

My mother's relationships.

I don't count my father,

neither does she.

But her first boyfriend,

High school sweetheart

Broke deadbeat loser:

My first boyfriend,

High school sweetheart

Broke deadbeat asshole.

Her second boyfriend,

An older guy, a lot older.

Divorced, but so was she.

Cheated on her

Four times.

I think she left after the fifth

To set an example for me.

I'm still on my second boyfriend,

But I'm waiting for him to cheat.

I'm waiting for the day I can say

I was right.

I am doomed.

## **Disaster Women**

My mother and I  
Are Disaster Women  
We circle each other  
Unseeing  
Eyeless.

## **Where Do I Go?**

I think the hardest part about figuring out who I am is that I feel like I am forgetting who I was. How long will it take for the version of me as a little girl, desperate to be my father's best friend, falling in love with Star Wars and Jurassic Park, to fade away? I no longer care about Star Wars but I still care about the version of me that cared about Star Wars, and I still desperately want to be my father's best friend.

The new, shiny version of myself holds no space for my old self, and as I shed my skin leaving it to decompose, who will remember me? Who will remember who I was? I will not.

## **Hurricane Girls**

I thought, if nothing, we had this in common:  
Being Hurricane girls.  
I grew up here in Louisiana  
Surrounded by water and poverty and heat and disaster.  
I was 4 when Katrina happened. She was 25.

I always thought my mom and I were Louisiana girls.  
But I remember when I found out my mom didn't grow up in Louisiana.  
She grew up in Washington state.  
They moved down here when she was a teenager  
Pawpaw got a job at one of the plants.

Both my grandparents are from Louisiana.  
But she isn't. She isn't from here.  
I remember asking her what snow felt like, and when she described it to me  
I felt so betrayed.  
I expected her to lie to me.  
I expected her to say she was a Louisiana girl, born and raised.

I remember recognizing her as a stranger.

**Oh,**

To be free like the water washing away the leaves in the street.

Hot autumn rain,

Racing

Racing

Racing

Race

Rrrrrrr.....

## **My Mother Hates Me**

a lie and a truth.

I try to convince my mother that she hates me.  
Every time she says I love you,  
I say,  
You hate me,

And every time I say you hate me  
She says, I could never hate you.  
And every time I say I ruined your life  
She says, you were a blessing.  
And every time I say you were meant for so much more  
She says, you were meant for me.  
And every time I say you had your whole life ahead of you  
She says, you are my life.

Neither one of us ever win the argument,  
But every time she gets mad at me, I remind myself its because she hates me,  
And every time I get mad at her, she reminds me that she loves me,

And I know I'll never fully convince her to hate me,  
Just like I know she will never fully convince me that she loves me.

But we still try.

## **Embraced**

I breathe underwater.

I sink and am pulled.

Find me in the afterbrush.

Gone, stuck, here, under.



## **Hiding Places**

I wear my mother's face  
And commit my father's crimes.

And I am my father's angel,  
And my mother's whore.

And I feel these parts of them,  
In my hands,  
My heart,  
My eyes,  
My head,

But most often, between my legs.

In the dark, between sheets,  
Where they can't see what they've done to me.

## **Ghost Hunting**

My parents went to LSU.

This is where they met, actually.

At a frat party one chilly November night.

They got pregnant with me less than a year after that.

I think I was conceived sometime in July,

After my dad returned home from spending his summer making money on a shrimp boat.

I walk around campus now seeing the ghosts of them everywhere.

The ghosts of their 20-year-old selves.

I'm older than them, now.

I pass my dad's first apartment on my commute to campus every day.

Sometimes I picture their life there together.

20, and pregnant, in college, in a shitty apartment across the street from Taco Bell.

I wonder if they ever miss it, that first apartment. I do.

I joined a book club run by my dad's thesis mentor.

Our book was on water engineering,

Something I know and care little for.

My dad still comes to campus once a month.

He's a Tau Beta Pi club mentor.

I only learned this recently, when I ran into him on campus.

I asked him why he never told me, why he never asked to meet up.

He told me he thought I wouldn't want to, that I'd be too busy.

I see their ghosts, and I mourn their futures,

And I wonder, sometimes if they mourn themselves too.

## **Our Eyes**

I can't write a poem to my mom.  
All of my poems are about her, surround her,  
But I can't look her in the eyes.  
My eyes,  
The eyes she gave me.

She used to brag about how I got her eyes,  
Her nose, her laugh, her love of reading.  
I used to be so proud of my mother's eyes.  
Now I hide from them.

I think one day, maybe, I can show her these poems.  
That I can present them to her, and say,  
"Look mom."  
This is my life, these are my memories, my feelings, my soul.

But then I remember,  
When I told her about the time that she told me I ruined Christmas,  
And I remember how sorry she was,  
And how she said she didn't remember any of it.

I don't think I could bare how unremarkable these memories would be to her.  
I don't think I could bare her apologies.  
I have already forgiven her for every line,  
Before writing them.

I don't know if she can forgive me for writing them.