

HALF-CUP RAGE

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It might be hard to understand why I'm fascinated by my first, and only, rage if you don't know me. Basically, I'm a nice *yes* girl and I want you to like me. *Yes, I'd be happy to chair that committee; yes, I'd be happy to watch your kids this weekend; yes, I'd be happy to read and edit the young adult fantasy novel your friend wants to self-publish.* I'm considerate and polite. I write prompt and personal thank-you notes, bring you dinner when you're sick or grieving or stressed or have a new baby, and ask after every living relative you've ever mentioned. At Christmas, I make 150 dozen cookies – twelve or fifteen different types – for my annual cookie party and to give away to family, friends, and everyone from clerical support staff to my dental hygienist.

I also avoid conflict, try to mediate confrontation, and wince when people start shouting (or even raising their voices). That's not to say that I don't get angry. I get plenty angry, but I keep quiet about it. I stew and then come home and vent, letting fly all the nasty things I wish I'd said. Or, if I'm already at home when I get angry, I'll go out to do all that. Either way, the person who inspired my anger rarely, if ever, knows. But, I don't just tamp down my own anger. I also go out of my way to try to prevent other people from getting angry (and, yes, I'm sure there's some sort of classic psychological explanation involving my childhood, but that's not relevant here).

Now, perhaps, you can imagine the shock of my first rage.

September 2013. I am in the middle of preparing a dessert to take to a friend's birthday party, and I need

a half-cup measuring cup, which I can't find. This frustrates me: not only is the dessert waiting, but I own two sets of measuring cups, so it shouldn't be all that difficult to find a half-cup. But, I can't find one. As I search through all the drawers and cupboards and the dishrack, the dishwasher, and even beneath and behind all the pots and pans, I *feel* myself getting angrier and angrier. "Aaaaah," I scream, as loud as I can, because the anger is mounting, mounting, pushing me, demanding a release. I slam the drawers. "Where the FUCK is my half-cup measuring cup?" I yell. "FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!" Over and over at the top of my lungs (those fricatives might feel good, but they're not really doing much to help the situation). John comes downstairs. He looks kind of scared, definitely surprised. "What are you yelling about?" he asks, quite calmly given how disturbed he looks; he's never witnessed this sort of rage in the twelve years we've been together. "WHAT? You think you're the only one in this house who can YELL WHEN YOU'RE MAD? And where the FUCK is my half-cup measuring cup?" He makes a show of looking in the drawers and cupboards and then retreats silently back upstairs.

The dessert is waiting and my quarter-cup measuring cup is sitting on the counter, but by now I am so enraged I refuse to use it. I slam more drawers, but that doesn't make me feel any better. I kick a drawer, hard. Ouch. Part of my brain tells me not to do that again, but I'm hell-bent on physically releasing this anger. (What are my options? I don't want to hurt my toe again.) Instead, I take a box of plastic wrap and start beating it against the cupboard door.

Wham! Wham! Wham! Ooooh, that feels so good. More: Wham! Wham! Wham! until the box is pretty much destroyed.

Then I head for the stairs. "I'M GOING TO THE MARKET TO BUY SOME MORE MEASURING CUPS," I scream up to John. "Do you want me to drive you?" "YES! I'M TOO MAD TO DRIVE," I yell. More seething; more steaming. This rage has some real staying power. Even in the midst of it, I'm surprised by how long it's lasting. At the market, I decide to get some Pamprin. I think I need to calm down, but I can still feel anger coursing through my body. When I see the measuring cup options, I start to get worked up again: the affordable plastic ones have a little spout, and I'm convinced that makes it impossible to level off the dry ingredients properly (is the little spout *part of* the measurement or *in addition to it*?); the stainless steel ones are \$18. I would never pay \$18 for a set of measuring cups, but I do. I'm just that mad.

When we leave the market, John offers to take me to the yarn store, which he hates to visit. I must be worse off than I realized. But, it works. All that yarn, the colors, the textures, even the smell of the wool seems to have an effect on me. Either that, or the Pamprin is kicking in. By the time we get home, I'm exhausted, utterly spent. I feel like I've been in some kind of battle, with more than the drawers and the plastic wrap. I finish making the dessert, feebly try to mend the plastic wrap box with packing tape, and then sleep like the dead – or the drugged.

Which, come to find out, I am.

Pamprin's active ingredients are acetaminophen (a pain reliever), pamabrom (a diuretic), and pyrilamine maleate (an antihistamine), and as I've since learned, antihistamines have sedative properties and are widely used for those properties in over-the-counter sleep aids like Unisom, Sominex, and ZzzQuil. When I recount this episode of hormonal rage to one of my friends, she laughs and quickly responds: "Isn't that typical? Men make a pill that says 'take something for the pain and go to sleep.'" As progressive feminists, we've got the low-down on Big Pharma, so we're unfazed that Pamprin's makers as-

sume hormonal women and girls need to be sedated (we are, however, a little shocked and disgusted that the pills are a sickening pale lavender that someone thinks women will find appealing). But, men have believed in our need to be sedated for all sorts of emotional states for centuries, so it's not like Pamprin is operating in a cultural void.

Why, then, you wonder, did I reach for the Pamprin in the first place? Why did I assume my half-cup rage was what I've come to think of as a perimenopausal *hormonal rage*? Call it peer pressure. OK, not peer *pressure*, exactly. More like peer *influence*. *Friend influence*. The story of flying into a rage over a seemingly minor incident or remark or frustration is the vernacular art form for women "of my generation" (loosely defined since most medical sources suggest that perimenopause can affect women anywhere from their early 40s through their 50s).

To wit: one night, a good friend arrived for a very small dinner party without his wife, also a good friend. "Where's Sara?" I asked him when he showed up, alone, holding the dessert she had made. "Well, we kind of had an argument and she's not coming." Hahaha. What a joker. I looked around him, into the dark beyond, assuming I'd see her walking up from the car. "No, really, she's not coming." He didn't seem distraught or upset, so I still didn't believe him, but I asked what happened. He proceeded to recount a story of his having said something that completely set her off; he's not even sure exactly what he said that was so bad (I suggested a few possibilities). Then Sara just erupted. Rage. Screaming. Tears. Huge Fight. But, this is his side of the story, I thought to myself as I returned to the kitchen to finish the dinner and call Sara. "Are you OK?" Yes. And, yes, James' story is essentially accurate. The rage was disproportionate to the disagreement. But it was a full-fledged rage, nonetheless. One of those perimenopausal things. Happens more and more. Just lost it. Completely exhausted. Weepy. Going to sleep. "OK, I'll send a plate home with James so you can eat later – or tomorrow."

Sandra TsingLoh, the writer, performance artist, and National Public Radio regular, describes a few of her own hormonal rages in her humorous and mov-

ing memoir of approaching menopause, *The Madwoman in the Volvo: My Year of Raging Hormones* (2014). My favorite is the one that convinces her she wants to take on her daughter's 12-year cyberbully (she gets as far as waiting for him after school before her daughter persuades her to spare her the humiliation). She also recounts an anecdote from Christianne Northrop's *The Wisdom of Menopause* (2001), in which "Aunt Carol" – going through "the change" – throws a leg of lamb right out the window. As TsingLoh says: "Woo-woo! Duck, Uncle Ralph! Go, Aunt Carol!"

Part of me hates the fact that I attribute my half-cup rage to raging hormones. Generational women's genre or not, to frame my story in that way just seems downright sexist, as if the only way to understand women's rage is through discourses of hormonal shifts. Did I learn nothing from second-wave feminism's revelations about women and madness in the nineteenth century? Have I ventured so little from discourses of *hysteria* – that condition of the traveling womb – and their real, material effects on women and women's bodies?

Then again, another part of me remembers the visceral feel of that half-cup rage as it literally moved through my body. It's like going under general anesthesia, except that with anesthesia the hot, tingling drug seems to creep slowly from the injection site through your veins (and knocks you out in under a minute) whereas this rage is *fast*, cycling through my closed circuit of a body and certainly not knocking me out. I have never experienced an anger like this, even when pushed by much worthier causes than a misplaced kitchen utensil (or two). The idea may rattle my feminist sensibilities, but that doesn't negate the possibility that this rage is hormonal.

While this strikes me as the most likely explanation, yet another part of me really wants that half-cup rage to be its own pure rage – as if such a thing even exists. Good girl that I am – conflict-avoidant, anger-repressed, eager to please – I'm deeply familiar with the fact that women's gendering pathologizes and demonizes our expressions of anger and aggression. But I want to be that sick, demonic woman instead of the perennial good girl. I want to be a real

bad-ass, the bad girl, the bitch, the one everyone remembers for all the wrong reasons, the one who makes history. Which is why I also love my half-cup rage experience.

Or is it?

Can I really be so besotted with my rage over a half-cup measuring cup? Righteous fury over a half-cup measuring cup definitely doesn't make me a bad-girl bitch, even in my own eyes. Half-cup rage is decidedly *not* transgressive. Especially with John as my only witness. My half-cup rage is really more like a tantrum. An awesome, powerful, raging tantrum. That in no way diminishes its memory or the startling pleasure of it or my longing for it to happen again. What is that all about? I've been reflecting on this question since my rage, which I immediately (well, *immediately* being some time after I awoke from my Pamprin-induced "nap") embraced and cherished with a strange sense of pride.

Such reflection brings to mind Lauren Berlant's work on sovereignty and subjectivity or, to be more precise, on *nonsovereign relationality* and what that might mean for imagining places of pleasure at the foundation of politics (2014). Pushing us to challenge our investment in the myth of integration as the desired state of subjectivity, Berlant suggests instead that *being-with-disintegration* might actually be a preferable outcome. Together with Lee Edelman, Berlant writes, "[t]o encounter ourselves as nonsovereign... is to encounter relationality itself, in the psychic, social, and political senses of the term" (2014: viii). How might a subject's nonsovereignty foster "both intimate and social bonds" (2014: 69), she wonders. Good question. How can we find out?

The primary difficulty, of course, is the actual disintegration, the dissociating, the becoming non-sovereign, when everything in our cultural and psychological training forces us toward integration. *Keep it together. Don't fall apart.* But, as I understand Berlant, the goal isn't nonsovereignty as a long-term state of being; that would be crazy-making, literally. No, it's a fleeting, momentary experience – *sex; that weird out-of-body teaching moment when you see yourself lecturing and lose your concentration; rage –*

that might help us imagine, perhaps even realize, unimaginable ways of being, alone and with each other.

I'm pretty convinced that I'm attached to my half-cup rage for this very reason, not because it means I'm some bad-ass bitch (although I still aspire to that). That said, when I *think* about my half-cup rage alongside Berlant's work on nonsovereign relationality, I am simply providing an intellectual or academic frame or interpretation for an intensely strange and inexplicably pleasurable experience. When I *feel* about my half-cup rage, I open myself to being beyond my control, being beside myself, falling apart, failing to keep it (and myself) together. To living.

References

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