What you know is sometimes better than what might happen

In a very personal writing style, Liz Rosenfeld writes about relationships, memorials, illness, love, the queer body and the experience of transitions.

Visual Essay / Liz Rosenfeld December 31, 2022

To Do List:
Dad turns 79 today / Call him after first chemo / send flowers and/or Hitchcock DVD
Owen arrives in Berlin/ organize with him
Testo shot at 10am
Gym at 11am
Bondage suspension rehearsal at 2pm/ * must eat lunch at 12:30pm
Cancel 10pm sex date
And just remember: It's hard to do anything today. And that's just how it is some days.

May 12th, 2022
"You look different," Joan said with the sensitive tonality as if she were sweeping away broken glass that I hadn't noticed as I walked barefoot down the street. "You look good…. Different."

"Ya… it's really happening," I said timidly, my eyes looking away from the computer screen. "I don't know how much you can really see… the changes through the camera, but it's intense and not intense. It's weird how the people in my everyday life don't really notice the differences. But I do… I guess I feel them more than I see them."

"Your face is different. More like your father's when he was a young man. You have his sideburns."

"I look different too," my Dad chimes in. "How come you haven't mentioned how different I look? I lost all my hair."

"Of course I noticed you lost your hair Dad, but to me, you still look like you."

"Ya well…. It's a shocker for me, I never saw myself look so thin and hairless. I lost 17 pounds in less than two weeks."

"I can relate, in a way. I guess what I mean Dad… is that I also look in the mirror and I see me and not me and also a form of myself I never knew I needed to see… if that makes sense."

"I definitely did not need to ever see this current form of myself," he replied.

"I understand, Dad. Even though you and I are having totally different experiences, it's hard to transition late in life and we both have no idea how things are going to turn out, what an end point is… but I think we share the same goal… we both wanna live for as long as we possibly can in bodies that support us, rather than bodies that feel they are working against us."

June 12th, 2022

I dreamt last night that I was tied up, naked, waiting to be topped. In front of me hung a floor-to-ceiling mirror. Writing in black marker on the mirror read: "Be patient Daddy." Staring at my reflection, "Gosh. It all happened so fast," I thought. I had a full beard. Hairy chest. Hard nipples. My clit was big and erect. My pussy wide open. I could feel the air roll over my body. I felt a dissociated sense of relief in the form of complacent acceptance. Is this what testosterone is supposed to feel

like? “I thought I never had a goal,” I said aloud to my reflection, “Is this my goal?” Usually, I am the top. Usually, I am the one making my submissive beg and wait for me, for Daddy to come and dismantle them. For Daddy to come and give them permission. But this time it was me. “It's all a bit obvious, isn’t it? Such a clique,” I said to my reflection. “I guess I didn’t expect … this.” And somehow, I continued to sink into a sense of deep relief, knowing that all I had to do is just wait. I had no idea who was going to arrive, or if anyone was going to arrive. But I felt that I could be there forever.

July 11th, 2022

An and I trek out to the queer beach in Lisbon. We take a car for an hour to the end of a narrow lengthy road, walk along old sandy train tracks, and through hilly dunes. “Feels like we are on the set of a 1970s porno film like “Sex Garage,” or “LA Plays Itself,” I say in a husky overheated voice. “It’s as if we are nowhere and everywhere at the same time.” I start to notice sun kissed men waiting for each other in the shadows of beach grass and low-rise trees. On the beach, in a deep stoned haze, I reminisce. I talk about Dan and Tomas. I don’t know why, but my thoughts lean to them. “They always knew before I did,” I said. “They saw the bear in me on the horizon.” “You talk about them a lot actually,” An responded. My bears. I realized I hadn’t spoken to them in years… certainly not since the pandemic. A few messages here and there. Social media. But no real check in. “I don’t even know if they know I am on T,” I said. “That’s wild.” My phone indicates a text message. My Dad’s been hospitalized with another chemo-related infection. Looking up at An, “Gotta’ call my Dad. Sorry I’ve been stoned and monologging for hours. Dan used to say that I was a Chatty Cathy when I smoked weed. What’s a Chatty Cathy anyway?” Later I looked it up: A Chatty Cathy was one of the first pull-string talking dolls manufactured in the USA in the 1960s. I remembered that I actually had one as a young kid, left over from my Mom. When you pulled the string, it used to say “I love you,” “I hurt myself,” “Please take me with you.”

July 12th, 2022

An and I are on the train from Lisbon to Porto. A message from Tomas pops up:

Tomas: “Hey Love, it’s been a long time. I am sorry for this sad message, but Dan has pancreatic cancer and it has spread to his liver. He’s in the hospital at the moment, with complications, but we hope to get him home soon. I thought you should know. I love you.”

Me: “I feel like you felt me thinking and talking about you and Dan yesterday on the beach… and a lot in general lately! I hate that hard times bring folks together and I am so grateful you reached out. Thank you. I love you too.

August 16th, 2022

I am sitting with my Dad and Joan, across the street from their flat, by the old West Side Piers, once a hot spot for queer cruising, now turned into gyms and family fitness parks. “That’s where the old bar the Ramrod used to be,” Joan points out, “I figured you would be interested.” On this trip, I have been able to sit with him, my Dad, outside for 30 mins a day, masked and distanced. He walks with a cane now. He’s skinny, very skinny. We talk about art and politics. His disillusionment with democracy. I tell them both quietly that Dan has passed and that I am blocked about what to submit for his memorial. “Just write down the story of how you first met,” Dad says, “people like that.”

August 17th, 2022

An waits patiently while I jot down my memory of Dan, we are about to leave to spend the day at Riis, the queer beach in New York City:

The first time I met Dan was at Stockholm Pride in 2010 (ish). After speaking on a panel with Tomas about the eroticisim of fatness in queer bodies, we attended an after-party. "This is my husband, Dan," Tomas proudly introduced and then left us alone. Dan explains how he had just moved to Berlin from San Fransisco and he was longing to meet a queer dyke. Berlin's queer scene is so segregated, and he was just deeply bored with cis-gay men and their performance of masculinity. We talked about our love of gossip and Samuel Delany. We couldn't wait to get back to Berlin and be in each other's lives. Joyfully drunk Tomas approached, threw his arms around us and said: "So wanna come back to mine for a threesome?" I'll never forget how seen I felt in that moment. These hot bears saw me as one of them. With his famous lovingly sardonic charm, Dan replied: "We are not going to have orgy at your mother's house… especially when she is home."

August 20th, 2022

"Hold on Dad," I just want to snap a quick pic. I photograph the empty halls and vast New York City views from the oncology ward on the 14th floor of New York Presbyterian Hospital. My Dad is tired. They say he has possibly developed a lung infection. He's running a little fever and had been admitted the previous night for observation. He's breathing hard. But he insists on walking around the nurses' station. "I don't wanna leave tomorrow. Feels weird," I say. "I understand, but you gotta live Liz," he says, "and when you come back, hopefully, we can hug and touch and eat and laugh again together." I stop to take another photo, "Sorry Dad… hold on." "It's okay," he says out of breath, "I get it! You have a vision!"

Perry Street, August 15th, 2022 liz.JPEG



[1]Liz

Rosenfeld, Perry Street, August 15th, 2022
Courtesy of Joan Rosenfeld

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