

# Family Construction

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A knowledgeable  
woman can read her  
future in a simple  
gesture....

Balzac

I have found my brother's sister who is not the road to happiness which we are not to give up on, he says. You are my sister, he says. I am his sister. Hansel and Gretel had no other sister and aren't we enough? As if like them he imagines we had dropped and kept dropping signs along the road to happiness so that we could return and repeat the journey in and back out of the forest, ever happier, luckier children. Jeremy believes in pure happiness and probably truth as well as all the things I cannot believe yet I have found you, Elizabeth, our sister who he does not believe is real.

More and more family signs point to more like us on a page in a book. I stop and speculate. Which book? What name to begin with?

Elizabeth has been searching for the one and only man who can say: This daughter is my daughter and I am back. Back from the forest? Back from the dead? Someone in the Bible is always saying: Be not afraid, it is I.

Also in the Bible someone says: I can do no evil neither also is it in me to do good. That is the way I am Ocarina ("little goose"). I am not evil neither am I good; goodwill is not enough. Is it enough for conversation with the dead? I converse with all the names of the dead that have not been deleted from The Book of Names: John and Jeremiah. There is no Judith left in the book. If there were a Judith, she would be a knowledgeable woman and could read the missing names. But she herself is missing from The Book.

A knowledgeable woman can read her future (sometimes her body) in a simple gesture of a certain kind. This gesture is what I am looking for. The gesture of a name that is missing and that names a thing that until then will be unknown.

During my first attempt to find a name named over other names, to find The Book that names it, a knowing woman said, "I believe few women have any idea toward what end they are striving."

Is this a knowledgeable woman I was talking to?

My palms lay flat, my body alongside lay invisibly covered in the ritual almond oil which I had purchased for this visionary occasion with her as I thought: There is more than one knowledgeable woman in the world.

Elizabeth says, "The last shall be the first. You are my sister, the first but not the last of sisters to come."

Seeking farther into Elizabeth's past, I find this warning posted:  
 Her gates are hidden in the ground;  
 I have destroyed and broken her bars.  
 Succulents flourish where once there was the law.

Elizabeth says these lines were in a letter she received from her husband. She does not know what he meant.

Jeremy doubts the advisability of any more family faces in his life now that he has more than enough. And the dead ones can stay dead. You can print that, he says.

Diary entry #1:

Never enough clean linen—need more whites all the time. Accumulating family like geese. Jeremy is sick of company. Asks me to keep them quiet when he is working. I am stiffhearted about it. Everywhere I go Elizabeth is following me. She stares at me as if she's trying to figure something out. Her husband arrives tomorrow. Almond butter and pecan pies are ready. I am anxious to see what the man who has destroyed and broken her bars looks like. Jeremy thinks this is a joke. Is this man a preacher, I mean is he some kind of evangelist? he asked Elizabeth today and she just sipped her iced tea and smiled. Unsettling. What's any one of us looking for?

Everyone likes the party. Elizabeth's husband John has come from Egypt where he says they were eating fish freely on the streets. Free fish? Elizabeth is confused and I wonder why her husband has been in Egypt without her.

"You'd love the cucumbers there," he says because I've served my delicious cucumber salad. "The leeks and onions are heavenly, too."

I think we are walking on our faces in the floor.

"And they have wonderful almonds there. They're ground into paste in a vessel while you wait. Imagine the desserts!"

Elizabeth stares at me. Something is breaking, and we're walking on it like we know these people we are talking to like people who have known each other.

Who is he? Jeremy asks. I am reaching out to Elizabeth, but she is inches beyond my touch out the window through an opening too small for my hand; she is out of reach. There is no road to happiness, and maybe the gates are hidden in the ground forever. Don't vanish, Elizabeth.

Just when I'm least expecting the world at my feet, there appears a knowledgeable woman at my party calling me over, picking me out of the crowd to tell me a secret. She says, "For some years I had known there was a deep flaw inside me growing stronger every day because I did nothing to stop it. The discovery came upon me like a speaking revelation it said: YOU ARE A MAN TRAPPED IN A WOMAN'S BODY."

I tell her she is like a Bible story that's been written to keep all of us forever in line over other lines like my name is under and covered by all the other names.

"Who are you speaking to?" she asks.

Who are you I am speaking to?

The knowledgeable woman with her Bible stories is facing me. I am facing the floor. Very much without a family story I am lying on the floor. I am searching. I have always searched.

The wall was warm on her face. Gretel pressed against the windowpane and liked the taste so she tore out a big chunk.

Elizabeth says what we are looking for may not be here. This is not the first time. It is not the last time. If the law is no more, why are we looking for the Book of Names—one thing exchanged for another? Plainly a simple gesture isn't enough for all the knowledge sealed in the pages of a book.

While lying on the floor, I realize that I have always confused those names in the beginning of the Bible with what was not like that. It says: These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle and everything you see is mine. Whose father is speaking and why is he saying these things?

John is saying how delicate shell fish are caught and cooked on the Nile or in the Dead Sea.

I am not part of the Dead Red Sea. I move out of the way of the movement of large bodies of water. Lying on the floor, I am not a statue that stands by the sea. Is the law that is no more the one that is no more than the one Elizabeth is looking about for the father who is no more than a name?

Some people in the room are folding a stack of leaflets piled high against a wall. What's printed on them is: "The young and the old lie alike on the ground in the streets."

There's more in the leaflet, but I stop reading it because there are too many ways to read it at once.

This is a simple thing I am seeking: a name named over other names. A gesture of naming and of taking away a name.

John slips out of the kitchen and I follow him leaving Elizabeth and Jeremy alone. "You are an international male," I say. "Tell me how to find The Book of Names."

"You know what you want and you know where to find it," he says and I receive his words like a misdirected kiss. "The law is no more and what is no more will do you no harm."

These cattle are my cattle. Everything you see is mine.

## Diary entry #2

Mussels are very familiar animals, along with starfish. A plain casting rod is insufficient for catching large fish. For that you need know-how; you need to know how things are done.

In a dream I am surrounded by mussels and baby starfish and they are all crying at once. What can I do? OPEN THE GATE, they are screaming and I begin to scream. There is no gate but there is surplus color everywhere, and I am running like a green and red machine, so bright you can see no other colors beneath my running colors.

All things are relative to the knowledgeable woman. Even the edge is a relative phenomenon once you have fallen. You can get away from thinking like this but not for long.

You know what you know from the woman who knows what she wants many times over and over like a machine—think of her now. There is no harm in knowing the machine.

Elizabeth sees a man in the street. It is not Jeremy she sees. It is not John she sees. It is a man but not any man she knows.

In the army and navy surplus store Elizabeth buys a Swiss army knife for her protection against people who ask her to vote for them— always a danger sign.

John has left her a note in place of himself.

It says: For some years I have known there was another man inside me and he just couldn't stay quiet any longer. Everywhere I look he is looking back at me and giving me visions like you have but never in my line of vision. It isn't against the law to have visions or to break the gate that's hidden in the ground....

I hold Elizabeth like a child in my arms as she looks at me trying to figure something out. A man will sometimes be gone, Elizabeth. We will search for your father somewhere in this city where little good is done but no harm comes from looking. Somewhere in this city there are men who are fathers and they are fathers whether or not we have found them like us in a page of a book, registered in The Book of Names in The Book of the City in The Book of the World.

When Jeremy writes to tell me he has arrived in Egypt, he has no need to say how it is in Egypt. His lament is my lament. His past is my past as Elizabeth is the present. I will see him again. He writes that almond paste is good for the skin, but it will not keep you from aging each and every moment.

The snorting of strong horses means Dan has come to the city. The whole land trembles at the sound of the neighing of his horses overhead as they drop from the sky to our streets. They might devour the city before the children find their fathers and who will ever know who belongs to whom?

I rush, I am searching, running on green and red tracks where leaflets announce help for the poor, no names needed. I am not evil nor am I good. This daughter is my daughter. Who is speaking these words? Almond paste is good for the skin. Nothing can stop the move-

ment of large bodies of water through the land. Hurry, Dan, I need you.

In an effort to accumulate data I copy the entire history of births and deaths in the city. All the way back. I am sure I will die if the heat wave doesn't abate. Dahlias droop and die within seconds seething in their pots. In fact, none of the names I find in *The Book of Names* seem right but what would a right name sound like?

Elizabeth's father was an international male known to many women but that makes him no easier to find in the history books. It's true he spoke to crowds, but who could be bothered writing it down?

I see a horse landing in the street.

You know what you know—you know what you want to know. You know what they want you to know.

(What will become of the known viral life forms which plague mankind already which, not living and yet not nonliving, are ambiguously alive?)

I come across one name that sounds right. Why this name? I am afraid to say its sound, and is it the sound of the pleasure of my finger leading me in the right, the direction to the center of truth? My name, my one and only true name?

The horse's eyes are level with her eyes out the window. You could be anybody's horse, she says, any any any body's horse.

Broken bars and closed bars, locked and destroyed. Where are all the bars in this city of countless bars?

Sealed books—not a person but a book followed by a person.

There is a moment when Elizabeth is sure she has found her father sitting in a dark corner of our own neighborhood bar. Outside horses are neighing loudly and she asks Dan to shut them up so as not to arouse his suspicion.

Elizabeth speculates on what kind of man he is. She is fatigued from delivering surplus leaflets to every part of the city, lost most of the time. Words, leaflets, announcements—you could die lost in this city.

In Egypt Jeremy has fallen in love. It is no accident there is dark hair in abundance everywhere.

Elizabeth is around me, she holds on and floats as if I am her body of water, the one who stays afloat and sails away with both of us.

To the man sitting in the corner of the bar Elizabeth says, "I am looking for my father. Your face might be recognizably his face."

***Gretel ran straight to Hansel and opened the door of the shed.***

**Elizabeth's Swiss army knife is safely in her pocket unopened. "Can you tell me where you've been?" she asks the man sitting in the corner. "This could be the gesture of my life."**

**Dan's horses surround the building. They devour whole cities like Biblical punishment stories where no one is left alive behind the walls.**

**These are stories of family life like my body engulfed in stories of God's revenge, whose stories are not my stories.**