

On time: Montreal, 1989

JUDY BATALION

“Is everyone ready?” I called from my room.

One of my eyes was focused on the mirror as I checked out my creation – an all-white *Working Girl* power suit from Jacob Jr. with shoulder pads, a pleated skirt, and a blue and white polka-dot shirt that sported a medieval jester’s six-inch collar, all of which molded my 12-year-old shapeless physique into the strong, sharp contour – of a square. I’d had my hair done the day before; I’d gone with Samantha Horowitz and her mother Fran to the salon in the Cavendish Mall. Samantha got a flowing perm, but I knew Dad would freak out (*no piercings, tattoos, or perms—NOTHING PERMANENT*) so I just said “tease me” and lord. Sylvain the Quebecois Indian hairdresser who bore an incredibly suspect resemblance to Vanilli (including both leather pants and mane) had split my fringe in two, making half my hairs stand on guard, while the other half were plastered down my forehead. Then he’d blow-dried my long frizzy tresses straight, his arms sinewy as he drew out the strands, humming at how alluring I

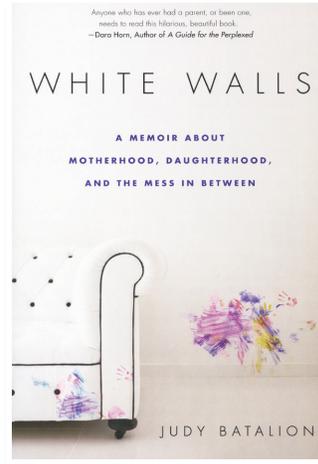
appeared. *Girl . . . you know it’s true.* Of course, sleeping on it all night had not tamed the look, shall we say, and now several areas of the do were fully erect. Worse, the bottom of my hair turned outward like a ’70s artsy fling. I used two brushes and all my strength to try to curl these tasteless waves under, power-woman straight. Overall, the look had the sexual appeal of smoked trout.

“Everyone? Anyone?”
My other eye was on the clock. June 12, 1989, 9:48 a.m. In 72 minutes, I’d become a woman!

I brushed harder. Damn rebellious hair ends. “Hello?”

No answer, except for the sound of morbid trumpet calls and a voice so deep it was as if the speaker had awoken from his own death. *It’s Jewish hour*, emanated from one of the many radios that were always on in the house, crowding even the air with sound waves. *Today: a new story from the gas chambers.* “Hello?”

I ran down the slippery hall (particularly so due to my fishwife beige stockings) to the den, where Dad lounged hidden behind his papers. I smelled rare minty aftershave and saw his shoes sticking



days trying, in my imagination, to make the shapes around me fit neatly together—which this house’s piles of expired *TV Guides* and bargain basement towels did not. At school, I’d dropped out of drama, choir, and the annual reading competition to become a scientist, like Dad. I was a math nerd, drawn to balanced equations, ordered graphs, patterns that plotted neatly along the x-time-axis.

“It’s getting fast,” Eli said, his thumbs punching with force.

The more blocks that dropped, the more time that passed, the faster it all became, heading toward frenzy. I understood. Nintendo was one of our sibling ways of interacting along with a slew of imaginary characters – the Ukrainian Robot, Tony the Tiger, the jailer of Nottingham – that had peopled our make-believe games and our real conversations. “When you’re done, please put on your pants, Captain Crunch,” I pleaded and left for the kitchen, where I assumed I’d find Mom among the piles. “Mom.” I took a deep breath. Gentle, abrupt, I was always saying the wrong thing. “Mom, I—”

She wasn’t there.

out from beyond the newspaper. He was ready, as always. Eli, on the other hand, was wearing a shirt and navy blazer, but no pants. “Eli!” “I have 212 lines,” he said from behind his Game Boy.

“Wow.” That was pretty good. We were both obsessed with Tetris. I spent my

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