

## Homework Help

Dedicated to community policing, at the Greenport town hall meeting, Meg and I offered to set up and man a checkpoint at the entrance to town. A painting had been stolen from a major art museum in the city and a kid on a bike who must have seen a photo of the painting on Slate or Vice had spotted it in the trunk of a hatchback on NY-25 just outside town. There was a search for the painting underway, and I liked that I was part of it, but my part depended on the openness and vulnerability of a community that could never have been required legally to pop its trunk for a jerk like me. It was the sheep in them that made them do it—or it was the shepherd in me that couldn't let an individual get away with something unruly and that shepherd is the worst of the sheep.

The sign said Toddler Time, 10:30AM, Wednesdays in May. Parked outside the library were more cars than I had seen. Moms for Toddler Time, I thought, till I walked closer. The van was not a mini-van. Beside it was a red two-door, both cars running, their drivers inside. A man with white stubble leaned from the van window into the earshot of the other guy and said to him as he made eye contact with me, "I don't think you're safe going anywhere." I tried to read in his face whether he had the painting back there. The sign had previously advertised Homework Help at 3PM. When Meg and I drove by, I joked that we should attend. "We could help with the homework," she said, before suggesting among the DVDs that we rent *An Education*. We also rented Derek Jarman's *Wittgenstein* which featured on the cover a young boy in glasses, shirtless, wound up in ornate gold crowns and rings and chains. From the back cover we learned that Wittgenstein "preferred detective fiction and Carmen Miranda to Aristotle." I made Meg promise that if I died first she'd make the back cover of my biopic's DVD say, "She preferred pop music to opera and to Aristotle she preferred Wittgenstein." I had, like every other American girl, since childhood dreamed of being a famous philosopher and had pursued this dream as far as my talents would let me. Just kidding. It was an actor I and they dreamed of being, which is funny because actors dream of being other people. I met Sergei

during a semester off from theater. Instead of rehearsing all evening every evening, I had time to have sex and read. He and I put our bikes on RIPTA and I followed him through tiny beach towns full of chowder and beer. His anger made him irresistible to me. I too hated everything, but liked to be involved with men who hated it even more violently. I didn't like being the hateful one. I knew it was the end of my acting career fantasy when we went downtown to see a play, but instead of seeing it we took our clothes off in a downstairs bathroom while the ceiling's speakers played the sounds of the curtain rising and play beginning. Then we left for French fries at a nearby brewery where I said, "You don't make me feel safe going anywhere," and he said I'd made him my scapegoat again.

3:10PM and my high school friends were dependably hotboxing Ben's Civic while I got tutored in math, watching a beetle repeatedly slam into the window. My tutor was the first divorced person I'd met, controlling, measured, Irish, careful, obsessed with Turkey, the country, where later she moved for good. Her handwriting was the product of another generation's educational priorities. She taught me how to fight with my parents, telling me go home and say, "This is how you're making me feel," not "This is what you are doing to me." That night I went home and said it made me feel shitty that I had to be tutored in math while my friends who were worse in it got to learn how to party, something I'd have to learn later, when it no longer really mattered. I stood in the kitchen, backed into a corner between two counters, my parents recently home from work. I was angry when they signed me up for anything – camp, school, therapy, tutoring – fighting so hard to discover the feeling that life and its physics, which I found limiting and which have yet to explain the soul, weren't forced on me, that they might retroactively become something I had chosen as a tumor in my mother.

Meg and I spent only a weekend in Greenport before we decided to move here. Fresh out of college, resisting law school, we had no other plans due to what, depending on your age, political party and capacity for empathy, you'd call millennial laziness or Bush era recession. We found a small house and pooled our inheritances from aunts and grandparents our emotional connections to whom rendered our places in their wills mysterious, karmic, unsettling,

and thought we'd share it, freelancing till something better happened in our lives – men, women, children, financial gain, artistic fame. It was the first time either of us had hired a lawyer. And here we are still, camouflaged among the others going to work, going to school, to the IGA, fishing for the day's compliment, which is to be the only person at the intersection, nothing impeding your cross, dry laundry on the first try, free pie, the accomplishment of getting along across the dinner table, not being sick of the people you know. Thursday, May 18<sup>th</sup>. I'm waiting for Jason, who is five minutes late. The library sings of wear and decay. The xerox'd crosswords offer themselves from a clear plastic organizer procured at Opportunity Thrift, all proceeds to the local hospital. And who would drive out to Greenport, Long Island just to donate office supplies? But people drive out here with all sorts of things.