

## Permission to Fail

With my first book, it was *Ally McBeal*. I was done with edits and out of love and trying hard to be a person in reference to no one but myself. I woke up and went to work at the same job I'd had for years. I went on tour and came back unsure. Was there some other thing I should be doing? Something to aspire to beyond the impossible milestone of a first book at twenty-five, the accomplishment that made people I'd known forever suddenly behave differently around me?

Ally takes cases to trial and often does well in spite of absurdity. Though she hates the way it makes her feel, she works at a firm with the man who left her in law school, the man she thought she'd be with forever. She sees a baby dancing at the foot of her bed and wonders if she's making the right choices or if there are other, better choices she's missing out on. Is it even success when there's no opposite? No point of comparison but what you didn't do instead? Is it better to have a partner than to be a partner at a firm?

I turned to Ally and wondered what kind of example she was not quite at random—my dad watched *Ally McBeal* religiously during its initial run, and my first book was about my dad, so it felt right to dive into a thing he loved when much of my life was suddenly about discussing him and his death in public. I might have spent more time talking about Ally than I realized, because, to my shock, she was mentioned in my first major book review as an obsession of mine that might belie my other pre-occupations: chief among them, grief.

Over the course of the show, Ally and her friends at the firm talk constantly about gender and its influence on how the world receives us. About how gender shouldn't matter except that it always will, whether we want it to or not.

Recently, my therapist asked me why I thought I finally felt safe in my current relationship, possibly for the first time ever. We reviewed the narratives of relationships past, where my opinion about whether or not to date someone was mostly overridden by the desire of the other person. If they