

it shameful after all to have more than one kind of feeling about a major loss? It was always clear to me that for Ally, loss was an experience to grieve, but also one to thank for where it pushed you next.

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I keep looking for fictional women I can observe performing themselves in the hope there's something worth mirroring there. It's not for lack of women worth mirroring in my own life, but rather for lack of women in my own life with the same dreams and defeats as me. My mother had three children already by the time she was my age; she always wanted a family, something I don't crave. My sisters have wildly different professional ambitions and relationship stresses than mine. My friends have the same number of answers as I do, which isn't many, and the ones we do have don't always work the way we want them to.

There's no way to be a woman in the current moment that doesn't require a revision of the rules imposed on us. I'm reminded of my de facto gender most when I measure what I expect of myself versus what other people expect of me. I watch the ways my male peers are allowed to pour all their energy into their art and find praise in that single-mindedness, while I often face criticism for doing the same. My assigned job as woman is to nurture, to bend, to absorb what's aimed at me and no matter the energy, to make it nice as I diffuse it. A long time ago, a partner told me there was only room for one artist in our relationship, so I needed to find something else to do. I look for his byline and when I don't see it, I can feel him cursing me for taking his place in the world, for being the one relentless enough to succeed. His voice is included in a chorus insisting that my pace is unsustainable, that I will wake up at forty and regret choosing books over marriage and children, a comment I hear ad nauseam in spite of the legion of people who have both or neither and still lead lives that make sense to them.

I curl up in bed with the TV on and hope for something I'm pretty sure isn't coming: somebody who lives like me, and proudly. But there's no TV show about a bartending poet on the edge of thirty who's more married to her work than anything else. Not one about a woman, and certainly not a queer one. The closest I've come might be Ally, in her frustration and neuroses and selfishness and