

flaw. She is upset by nearly everything. She has a baffling interior life that threatens her engagement with the things other people expect from her. She is good at her job, sometimes even great, while also hating how it constrains her. She's not real, but she is real in that she's one of the best friends I've ever had. She is wrong so much of the time, but her life is never over because of any single mistake.

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Ally is not the first primetime protagonist I've looked to for bad advice on how to live as my best self. I've seen myself in Jen Lindley and Joey Potter on *Dawson's Creek*, in Anna Stern on *The OC*, in Blair Waldorf on *Gossip Girl*, in Spencer Hastings on *Pretty Little Liars*. I watch a lot of what many people might refer to as trash TV, in part because I grew up on daytime soaps and love a good triple twist that could give even M. Night Shyamalan whiplash, but also because TV characters getting it wrong time and again help me to see the forest for the trees. I am not the only writer who's imagined what events will stand out in the narrative of my life. When I think of my favorite TV characters, I think of them experiencing events that seem monumental in the moment they appear, only to vanish faster than anyone can say "sweeps week."

I've arrived at a second book release, and the show I need has shifted. I'm watching *Sex & The City* for the first time, reveling in the equally nineties image of working women who don't want their lives dictated to them by the men they choose to spend time with. Like Carrie Bradshaw, I can't help but wonder. I wonder, but I can't conclude. Mileage varies so much. What I live means something to me, but it means something entirely different when I tell the story to someone else. I watch Carrie falling in love repeatedly, or at least hoping to, and see myself doing the same. I have had so many friendships end because of a conflict in worldview, so many partners leave when I wouldn't live how they expected me to. Carrie is a critical optimist, interrogating the meaning of every small thing she and her friends experience personally and professionally, but no matter how many communal disappointments there are, she is insistent that there is a worthwhile life to be had that doesn't look at all like the one socially prescribed to a woman her age. She enjoys emotional politicking, but she enjoys herself more. She stays up too late talking and decries every marginal catastrophe and spends her cab fare on new shoes she shouldn't covet and wears crop tops to every possible occasion and feels indig-