

*Confrontational Crotch
and
Other Real Housewives Musings*



Megan Cannella

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Poems and Creative Nonfiction

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March 16, 2020

As we pack up our desks,
headed to work from home
for the foreseeable future,
where only anxiety and dread
are visible—
no actual future to speak of—
I can only wonder
how they will shoot
new seasons of *Real Housewives*
if they have to socially distance.

Ten Rules for being a Successful Housewife

1. Develop a skewed sense of how real life works. If you aren't willing to bend the rules of reality a bit, I'm not sure this is going to work. This is the Golden Rule of Housewifing.
2. Have questionable taste in men. There are a few Househusbands that are winners, but honestly, that has limited crowd appeal. Not everyone can be a Joe Gorga—well-versed enough on the drama to comment hilariously but not enough to be involved. You're going to have to be willing to make out with men that you'll deny even knowing later. We're talking full denial (see Rule 1), even when the producers put together a highlight reel of all the times you made out with him.
3. Don't be too attached to having friends. Friends are great, but that can't be the main reason you're on the show. It's probably better if that's not a reason for you at all. If you're just here to hang out with your girlfriends, you're in for a surprise, and will likely be a one season Housewife.
4. Have a business plan for some kind of lifestyle brand. Develop it on the show, while giving your friends only the sketchiest of details. Be offended when they question your complete lack of business acumen. This can carry you through an entire season.
5. Be willing to start a cringy singing career if it starts to look like we might not care about your storyline anymore.
6. Be willing to try to save a failing marriage if it starts to look like we might not care about your storyline anymore. This will be harder than the singing career thing. Do it anyway. You can use some of the skills from Rules 1 and 2 here when you sit on the reunion couch and tell Andy Cohen that the show has shone a new light on your marriage and really helped you and your husband see your unhealthy patterns. Tell Andy how the rest of the girls and the audience helped

you to realize what matters most and that's why you're fighting for your family. Bend reality as much as you have to in order to make this sound convincing. You'll eventually get to leave him. Don't worry.

7. Be willing to accuse anyone else who makes the Rule 6 speech a liar, and possibly a slut and a negligent mother. If you need to make the speech, it will be real. If anyone else says it, they're just doing it to stay relevant. (Refer to Rule 1.)
8. Be comfortable naked.
9. Be comfortable failing.
10. Ideally, skip 8 and 9, and just be comfortable with naked failure. If you can fall over and mildly injure yourself while naked, I think that would be best.

Dinner in New Jersey

Studies show
family dinner
solves all problems,
increases unity,
raises test scores,

or something like that.

I don't think these studies
have accounted for
insidious influence
of sprinkle cookies.

Fancy Hotels Don't Get Bravo

When I travel,
before I check
for bed bugs
or stained sheets,
I check
the channel guide.

Some things are
nonnegotiable.

Whose wife are you?

Can these women,
franchise after franchise,
season after season,
finally solve
the problem

Betty couldn't name?

Faking It

After my boyfriend lied about having a brain tumor, I moved home to live with my mom. I mean, honestly, I don't know what else to say.

But of course there is more.

He and I lived together and loved together (or something that sometimes looked like love) for almost two years. I don't remember the more or the less of it anymore, but at the end, it looked like resentment and different futures. I didn't want kids. He wanted kids that I would raise and he'd eventually play video games with when they were old enough to be interesting to him. I wanted to move to pursue my career goals—a PhD and a professorship. He wanted me to stay in that two bedroom apartment without any goals at all.

But, time already spent made my heart soft and forgiving of things that should never be forgiven, until he told me he had a brain tumor. Correction: until he lied to me about having a brain tumor. You can't forgive a fake brain tumor. Or at least I can't.

The good news is that I was uniquely trained to have a boyfriend with a fake brain tumor. Years of dating charming, manipulative liars who had a flare for the dramatic and my extensive medical training courtesy of *Grey's Anatomy* prepared me for exactly this moment. It didn't take me long to realize this was all a pathetic, half-assed scam. The aforementioned charming, manipulative liars scoffed and assured me that if we were still together they would have put a lot more effort into this lie, because they cared about me like that and wouldn't have wasted my time like this

amateur. There would have been fake brain scans and invoices, which—if we're being honest—they would have tried to get me to pay. But maybe that would have been better. This fool didn't even care enough about me to cover up his lie. And that hurts in its own twisted way.

But then, I stumbled into our apartment at 5 or 6 am, after my last night out with my friends, to pack up the last of my stuff. I left my key on his desk, and we were done...without a word. It had all come down to the kind of angry, disinterested, early morning drunk that you can't argue with—another thing those charming, manipulative exes had helped me to perfect. A friend drove me and my stuff the three hours to my mom's house, and a phase of my life felt like it dissolved without much evidence that it had ever existed. Later, I'd find one of his t-shirts mixed in with my laundry, and I'd pawn the jewelry he had given me to pay for some car repairs on a deathtrap piece of shit car that didn't last much past those repairs anyway.

Of course, in real time, I'm pretty sure it was messier than this. We worked together. There were trips back and forth between that apartment and my mom's house. There were text messages asking me to come back. There was post-breakup flirting. There were post-breakup jabs at my mental health when the post-breakup flirting didn't go as planned. But in the end, I had to find some way to synthesize, because distrust is hard enough to navigate without having to find a way to swallow the hopeless minutiae of it all.

By the time I was unloading all my stuff into my mom's garage, I was probably still drunk. She hated this douchebag, for all the reasons you have probably guessed by now, so I won't list them here. She didn't talk about him. She didn't talk about the breakup. We both knew the relationship was a long, unmedicated, depressive mistake. It was over, and now, life could go back to

normal.

Except it couldn't.

Once my drunken indignation faded, I had to face the fact that someone I once loved lied to me in such a fundamentally brutal way that I wasn't sure how to trust anyone, even myself, because how can you trust someone who falls for fake cancer? How do you come back from a fake brain tumor? All the bizarre and preposterous realities I assume about people based on decades of watching Lifetime and *Dateline* are now plausible to me in an unshakable way, because if someone can fake a brain tumor why can't they do this too? How do you know?

The truth is, no matter what someone tells you, no matter how well you know them, or for how long, you just never know.

It also turns out, you can never convey that level of distrust to someone who lives a normal life, where only normal types of tragedies happen. While my mom knows tragedy, she knows normal tragedies. The kinds that are common enough to have check boxes on forms: Single, Married, Divorced, Widow. That kind of codified tragedy hits differently. There are books and classes and support groups for those losses, those betrayals. What do you do with: Unapologetically destroyed your sense of human decency, reality, and trust?

It turns out the answer to that question is simple: Season 10 of *Real Housewives of Orange County*.

I would sit on the long couch by the living room window, and

my mom would curl up on the loveseat. I am terrified of that loveseat because sometimes a rogue bug drops from the recessed lighting above it. But my mom has nerves of steel and has no strong feelings toward the loveseat—like a rational human who has lived a life of rational experiences.

She would wonder aloud about how these women can greet each other so effusively everytime they see each other and why they need to wear so much eye makeup and why they're always screeching.

I would reassure her this was the charm of the show.

We repeated this conversation every week.

But week after week, we saw a titan of Orange County insurance get wrapped up in a fake cancer scheme. Week after week, we saw what happened to me play out on TV, with higher production value.

We could laugh and yell at the TV about what I was living without having to discuss the things that were too hard to talk about. We could question the judgement of a woman with a boyfriend with fake cancer without questioning my judgement.

All the self-loathing I had for the version of myself that missed him and that stayed in the relationship long after I knew it was time to go, I could direct at Vicki.

That probably wasn't fair of me.

She was really going through it...or she was orchestrating it—it depends which of her castmates you ask. But she gave me a target for all those survivor feelings you don't know what to do with once you realize you've survived.

And now, Vicki is engaged to someone who presumably has no cancer at all, which I suppose counts for something. And I have the kind of once in a lifetime breakup story that makes everyone but me feel better about themselves, which I suppose counts for less.

“How could you do this to me question mark”

- after Countess Luann’s talk to text breakdown

The lack of question mark
after question mark

was felt by every woman who had been
cheated on by some lowrent scumbag.

All her friends knew he was skeezy,
but they faked smiles of support,

so they could be there when she needed
to get day drunk and burn napkin effigies of him

in the ashtray of a dive bar, the kind that is always
dark, even at 10 am, as they fry up eggs

on a grill that probably hasn’t been cleaned in a while,
but, honestly, whose hangover are clean eggs gonna help

question mark.

Reunions

I went to a Catholic, all-girl school for all four years of high school. Every day of those four years, we were led to believe we were making lifelong friendships, friendships to carry us through all the seasons of life. Afterall, everything has its season.

A season to nervously date

A season to be experimentally slutty in college

A season to get really worried about the unprotected sex you had with that guy whose last name you can't quite remember because you never asked for it

A season to get serious and establish a career

A season to settle and marry

A season to have unprotected sex without worry because you're married now

A season to get knocked up

A season to cut back at work until the kids start school

A season to find out you should have been worried about having unprotected sex because your husband is cheating on you

A season to go back to work part time at your kids' school

A season for divorce

A season for chardonnay

A season for bridge and ladies' clubs

A season for luncheons

A season for showing off your decades long friendships that started in high school

When we were young enough to roll our plaid uniform skirts, as if the only thing keeping them from being attractive was the hemline, we'd see these women—who used to be us, walking the same halls, slipping notes into the same lockers, and because of the lack of resources at small, private, all-girl Catholic schools, sometimes even using the same textbooks—all of us gathered in the auditorium for the alumni mass, all of us in one room as if we all existed on the same continuum.

But we weren't them, or you were and I wasn't. Because now I am 2000 miles away from home, and you don't invite me to your sparkle night parties with the rest of the girls who used to eat lunch with us.

Even the girl who drank her applesauce cup gets invited, and you shit yourself in my bathroom when we were in second grade, but whatever. Sure, she can be your lifelong friend. Makes sense.

Instead of going to our class reunion with a cash bar at some restaurant our parents would have gone to fifteen years ago, I am at home, in the neon green panties that I have been wearing all weekend and a cut up old hoodie, watching an encore presentation of a *Housewives* reunion. My hair hasn't been washed since before I put on these panties, and I feel kinda gross, as you'd maybe imagine. I also feel a little glamorous though, because I am here, eating low-fat organic string cheese by the half dozen, dipped in ranch, as if they were mozzarella sticks (because I mean...they are). I can wipe the ranch that narrowly misses my hoodie and falls on my tit with my index finger and lick it right up, because this is a no waste reunion, and not in the water conservation way that my state of filth might indicate—that is just regular, adult depression.

I am not wasting fake smiles on people who used to know everything about me and now wouldn't recognize me on the street. I am not wasting money on seven weak gin and tonics in an attempt to dull the frustration of being so far away from people I used to be so close to. I am not wasting stories about who I am on people who aren't listening because they're trying to figure out how who I am and what they used to know about me, what they used to like about me, and if they want to share their present with whoever it is I am now.

What's your tagline?

How do you see yourself?

How do you excuse yourself?

How do you forgive yourself?

How do you hide yourself?

How do you create yourself?

How do you reinvent yourself?

How do you sell yourself?

How do you return yourself?

Figure it out.

November 3, 2020

I turned off NPR
to watch
Jill
realize
Ramona
may never
be more
than a tennis friend,

how else
do you explain
her not being invited
to the cooking party

but then again
it may just be easier
to trust the devil
you know

When I don't know quite how I am feeling, I know that the Real Housewives of New York do.

Recently, I am sure I have been feeling a lot, but I am entirely unclear on how to name what it is that I am actually feeling. I think that's maybe the way things go when the world is crumbling around you, and you have been living alone in a studio apartment without much human interaction at all for the last seven months. In fact, the only real, deep, feel it from head to toe and all the way to your core interaction I've had during this time has been with the man who just told me he thinks that it would be better if he stopped touching me at all.

Because he respects me. Something about that respect makes touching me too complicated. It seems like touch comes with expectations and disappointment. I'm not sure of the math or science on this, but I was assured it was foolproof. Maybe that's because touch is life and death now—both because we're in our mid to late thirties and because we're living through a bizarre alternate reality where time and truth are obscured and covered in virus-ridden spittle.

When the Friday meeting started with my coworker asking us to find a gif to describe our mood and share it with the team, I quite simply wanted to die. I don't know what that feeling is called.

I just broke up with my boyfriend under some dubious, still unclear to me—but I was assured rational and mature—reasons. I am really trying to believe he is right. If I can trust someone enough to cum inside of me, I should probably be able to trust him on the state of our relationship, right? Maybe I didn't trust him all that much. Maybe I was just being slutty in that comfortable, familiar way that is selfish in a cumhungry but not always shaving kind of way. What's that feeling called?

I like the women I work with a whole lot. I do. But I don't want to share my unravelling Bethenny Frankel feelings with them in the Zoom chat. They are too sunshiney and polite for Bethenny feelings. These women are benefit of the doubt type women. Bethenny feelings are raw and snarky and drowning in tears. There is no benefit of the doubt in these feelings. This all seems like too much for a teambuilding icebreaker.

But that's ok. When in doubt, the Countess is there with the kind of hungover nonchalance that is perfect to share with casual acquaintances—*Be cool. Don't be all, like, uncool.*

If I am being honest though, I am Bethenny, an entirely specific flavor of Bethenny though. I am Bethenny being tormented by Ramona. Specifically, I am Bethenny—spread eagle, screaming *Mention it all!!!*—as a blacked out Ramona tauntingly points at Bethenny's crotch.

The Bethenny-Ramona dynamic is its own emotion. I don't know what this emotion is called either, but it exists, undaunted and timeless—a trope, a brand, a lifestyle that cannot be contained by just one word. Because, if we're all being honest, within the *Housewives* pantheon, there is no Ramona without Bethenny and no Bethenny without Ramona. That petty, cruel jealousy of Ramona attacking any hint of vulnerability that escapes Bethenny—whether on a bridge or in a living room—is an example of symbiosis that biology textbooks dream of. They both understand how to be betrayed and let down by literally every man they've ever met—except maybe Andy Cohen. They are willing to tear each other apart until the men who don't remember they even exist in the first place feel that pain. That is to say, they will claw at each other until the blood from their finger tips swirls with black rivers of mascara tears, creating a new category of life force that is entirely unrecognizable but undoubtedly essential to our existence, and therefore, it is readily available on QVC for

a very reasonable price, in the segment following Lisa Rinna's durable—yet versatile—sweaters.

The women I work with are entirely lovely. I miss gossiping with them in the office kitchen. I miss being petty with them, bemoaning the way grown women don't know how to clean up the broccoli florets that ricochet off the cutting board every day at lunchtime. *Who can eat so much broccoli? Her quarantine kitchen must be overgrown with broccoli by now!* If I were to tell them how I am really feeling in this godforsaken Zoom meeting, I would be the tension between Bethenny's confrontational crotch and Ramona's antagonistic fingers. Imagine not even being able to identify as the crotch or the fingers but only as the tortured liminal space in between. That is too embarrassing to even acknowledge.

Keep it simple: *Just be cool. Money can't buy you class. Chic c'est la vie.*

About the Author

Megan Cannella is a Midwestern transplant living in the high desert of Nevada. She loves both making and ignoring to-do lists. She's been in school for as long as she can remember, and she loves *Real Housewives*.

