



Activity Book

Kelly Schirmann



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by Kelly Schirmann

Illustrations

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ACTIVITY ONE

practice being angry
underneath the moon.
look at me, abandoned
like an SUV in a church
parking lot. remember the names
of a few trees, the smear of my plane
in the pastel sky. be totally humiliated
by your easy heart. when will you learn
your mother wants only to laugh
at you, & to be near you
while she is dying.

ACTIVITY TWO

practice being no one.
no one ever tells you
that what they really want
is their own warm genitals
across your face. nothing
is generational. on a good day
I remember that I can call my breasts
tits. I shake them over the blessed men
the way the onion bulbs
get clean of their dirt.

ACTIVITY THREE

practice abandoning the you
that requires constant praise.
watch money trickle out of you
like from a tiny, harmless wound.
this is what most people mean
when they say *grace*. in your hair
touching another person's hair
there is a pop song.

ACTIVITY FOUR

practice discovering a trap door
in your childhood home.
the blanket you remember
is decaying & holy.
you roast meats in a pit
with your brother.
you record it in your memory
like a mom.

ACTIVITY FIVE

practice mouthing the word *manifestation*
before fully absorbing its context.
draw a picture of your one father
on the day your mother told him
she no longer loved him.
manifest a tinier father
who fits in your shirt pocket.
give your father water, a memory:
pink baby in the kiddie pool.
some chunks of knowledge
come only with age.
your face in the mirror
falling off of itself.

ACTIVITY SIX

practice hardening
against what disappears.
you'll get upset seeing a bone
until you give birth
or get wounded. grow up.
there is no good cure for knowing
you can't dig to china.
your mother is sad
because she is so old.

ACTIVITY SEVEN

practice responding to a natural disaster.
the terrarium you've constructed
is brunch, a reliable chair,
a person you enjoy
seeing naked. life is boring
in its constant sexiness.
probably your parachute
is just somebody's lungs.

ACTIVITY EIGHT

practice being a reservoir
for every tributary of your guilt.
in the long run you will disintegrate
every terrible calendar. is it so animalistic
to be drunk on a porch at midnight
& so few communications away?
the plant we could have raised cooperatively
is still at the plant store. I am including you
in my fantasy but it's no big deal.

ACTIVITY NINE

practice being honest.
all your life there will be men
writing sports metaphors
in greeting cards. do you remember
when you exchanged hatred of culture
for hatred of self? I want something
to be alive for, but a face
is the only history
people care to listen to.

ACTIVITY TEN

practice being physically
& emotionally drained
by archaic social constructions.
there is the sound of thunder
& then there is the thunder.
there is nothing worse
than a bathroom wall
telling you everything
will be okay.

ACTIVITY ELEVEN

practice perfect attendance
to an event you had no choice
in attending. when it gets dark
carve a new road with explosives.
what you are committed to
is an allowance of crumbling.
you look at your naked body
but just imagine
if you could actually see it.

ACTIVITY TWELVE

practice acknowledging that fires do not heal. if there is a psychic in your vicinity, take her up on it. for once in your life, write a word on a leaf in permanent marker. photograph it against the beautiful goddamned sun.

ACTIVITY THIRTEEN

practice being kindling for a fire
you haven't worked through.
that little girl in you, fever dreaming
the sound of a gigantic turning wheel
in the bed of her mother, sees you finger
the lone branch and leave it
growing. if you are a cairn, be
a cairn. if you are proud of yourself
you should be.

ACTIVITY FOURTEEN

practice growing on someone.
do it from the inside, squeezing outward
toward your skin. down in the valley
you will not find water. up on the mountain
anyone can watch you fail
at hunting, fail at stomaching
the hunted meat. I am growing my hair
but on the inside. the weather is changing.
we should talk about it.

ACTIVITY FIFTEEN

practice developing an affection
for men & women whose personal beliefs
do not align with your own. I am standing here
refusing to tell you whether or not
you should be consuming beverages
with high fructose corn syrup in them. I don't care
about your internet presence, or the gifts
you will resolutely not give.
everyone wants to be left alone
to the eating of the honeydew melon
of the mind, near the creek of the mind
the wind won't stop digging at.

ACTIVITY SIXTEEN

practice your body against a new body.
wash your hair for another person
to smell. in the morning is when
the chemicals happen, I mean
existentially. you have a good skeleton
worth practically nothing.
you have fifty more years
of wondering if you are wrong.

ACTIVITY SEVENTEEN

practice internalizing your matter.
practice responding appropriately
when someone asks you what it is.
close your eyes & imagine
you are at a house party
that is 75% water
& has limited resources.
what you are wanting is okay
to want. when you finally escape
the sky will be new.

ACTIVITY EIGHTEEN

practice the nameless ritual
of applying a boundary
to what has no natural boundary.
walk the boundary day in & day out
in a weather of the boundary's choosing.
memorize the boundary secretly. call it
property. borrow against it.
shape your soft body alongside it
when you are wet. when you are dry
you will be a border to something
you no longer think of
as fun.

ACTIVITY NINETEEN

practice divorcing yourself
from your perception of yourself
based on an amalgamation
of exterior & inconsiderate wants.
whatever the chain of command
is for planets, get on it. do not be afraid
by what is obscured by a tree.
watch the woods move like I do.
be broken by the same
beautiful things.

ACTIVITY TWENTY

practice existing successfully
in close proximity to a person
of the opposite sex. there is nothing wrong
with wanting your wounds symmetrical.
there's just no name for the feeling
of wandering barefoot & naked
across the kitchen floor
of a one-night stand
& drinking their water
& not being in love.

ACTIVITY TWENTY-ONE

practice coaxing your pet into greatness.
you are in the river with your father
& your mother wonders if you will drown.
the boy from the woods is having a smoke
in the orchard. he is having sex with you
in the sea. the only secret there is
is a too-long joke. in your palm
is a dog tongue. in america
this is encouraging.

ACTIVITY TWENTY-TWO

practice immortalizing your senses.
understand that what you are touching
is not yours to touch. when you look
at a t-shirt, discontinue it
from your ex-lover's position
on t-shirts. you are royalty.
let your family surround you,
bearing fruit, anointing
your scars.

ACTIVITY TWENTY-THREE

practice your joy
in a way that is conducive
to perforating the joy
of those around you. buy flowers
if you feel like it, take up religion
or don't. all your life is clinging
to a narrative of your choosing
that is pre-approved
but untested. you are alone in this.
I love you very much.

Kelly Schirmann

Kelly Schirmann is a poet, musician, & visual artist from California. She sings in the band Young Family, whose EP *King Cobra* is now available from Spork Press. She is the co-author, with Tyler Brewington, of *Nature Machine* (Poor Claudia, 2013) & runs Black Cake Records, a web-based audio-chapbook label for contemporary poetry. She lives in Portland, Oregon.