



THE MERCURY

THE STUDENT ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE OF GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

Year 2019

Article 16

5-22-2019

Womanhood

May Lonergan

Gettysburg College, lonema01@gettysburg.edu

Class of 2021

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury>

 Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Lonergan, May (2019) "Womanhood," *The Mercury*: Year 2019, Article 16.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2019/iss1/16>

This open access nonfiction is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Womanhood

Author Bio

May Lonergan is a sophomore majoring in Psychology.

Womanhood

MAY LONERGAN

As an awkward fourth grader, I desperately longed to grow up. I dreamed of graduating from trainer bras and finally transforming into the majestic models I saw on magazine covers. I basically had two models living in my own house. Well, not actual models, but I did watch my two older sisters graduate middle school and they enter something called *puberty*. I was never really sure about what puberty entailed, but the changes in my sisters were obvious, and I was jealous. Their hair grew past their shoulders, they bought bras that weren't one-size-fits-all, and most importantly, they gracefully shed their baby fat, almost as easily as taking off an oversized winter sweater.

As they developed, my little girl figure failed to slim to perfection. In fact, I felt like my body was growing in the opposite direction. I may have looked beautiful in the biased eyes of my parents, but in reality I looked like Pillsbury Doughboy with wild, blonde hair that fell just below my ears. To make matters worse, my hair was so stupidly short that I couldn't even braid it to seem cooler. Believe me, I tried and the braid fell out every single time. The best I could do was a set of pigtails, and that would have been way worse. Clips fell out, headbands itched, and my hair simply wasn't long enough for a full ponytail. In defeat, a giant bow clung onto the right side of my head and I reluctantly solidified my title as the "adorable little sister."

It may seem immature, but that was the first time I experienced true envy. I wanted that. To be beautiful. To be a *woman*. Only I had absolutely no idea how to go about it.

In my defense, no one ever handed me instructions on how to be a "grown up." Ever since Maggie McPherson told me all the gory details about parents having "sax" in first grade, I was shielded from adult topics and my childhood knowledge remained inside the constraints of a perfect PG movie. When my sisters decided to snap their fingers and become beautiful, curiosity took control of my brain, as I drowned in a flood of questions. To be honest, the mystery of womanhood was captivating, and I was starving for more information. Being a girl was already hard work, but being a woman seemed utterly impossible. Nevertheless, I was up for the challenge.

It was 2009 and without a cell phone or computer, my iPod Nano wasn't cutting it. I had to take matters into my own hands. If I truly wanted to grow up, that meant uncovering forbidden topics on my own, even with-

out the help of the Internet. I made the executive decision to become a self-employed eleven-year-old detective, and my sisters were my subjects. With my favorite pink diary in hand, I examined their beauty routines and took notes. Yes, the rainbow on the cover was childish for the job, but at the time I was low on resources and the book even had a handy little lock. Privacy was essential to *my* cause, but I was perfectly fine with invading my sisters' privacy, for the sake of research. You've gotta do what you've gotta do in this business.

For some reason, even with the right resources, my detective skills failed me. I thought I was doing a pretty fine job, especially for a kid with an elementary school education. I managed to remain undercover and I could've sworn that each note I took brought me closer to womanhood. Unfortunately, the data just didn't add up.

As I watched my sisters rub lotion on their perfectly bare legs, I glared at the blonde fuzz covering mine, hoping my death stare would magically laser it off. When that failed, I knew what needed to be done. After re-reading my notes, I repeated the same process, step by step. It was supposed to be easy peasy, but I should've known perfection would be hard to achieve. No matter how many times I showered and lathered on the same moisturizer, the hair refused to disappear.

Don't get me started on the manicure fiasco. Older girls always had their nails painted pink, blue or red, and of course, I decided that I wanted pretty nails too. I knew my sisters would notice if their nail polish went missing, so I used the next best thing: the ancient Wite-Out that was crammed into "that drawer" in the kitchen. Every disorganized household has one; it's basically a treasure box of random junk from the past five years.

Anyway, apparently people have to use actual nail polish for a true adult manicure. Even though Wite-Out has a handy little brush to paint on small surfaces, it never dries as smoothly as nail polish. Never. It is impossible to take off and no one wants nails that look like melting marshmallows. Trust me, I learned that the hard way.

It was only one week of intense detective work, but I already felt like a failure. I was too nervous to steal any nail polish, and the moisturizer I borrowed didn't work at all. To make matters worse, I didn't find anything useful in their bathroom cupboards. I continued my raids and searched through the boring stuff: old tubes of toothpaste, some stray hair ties, shampoo. I found nothing. Nothing could help me become a woman, or at least that what I thought.

Every good detective needs a reliable informant. Although I was not looking for one, I praised God for sending me Claire Maco the day she ran into the classroom with confidential information. After recess, the oblivious boys shuffled back to their desks, while a group of girls suspiciously accumu-

lated in the corner of the room. Of course, like all the other girls, I practically sprinted to the cubbies to hear Claire's juicy gossip.

"I'm telling you guys, there was blood everywhere, all over the toilet. It might have been a middle schooler, but you never know. My mom got hers super early," Claire exclaimed as she uncrossed her arms and looked at her audience.

She really must've known what she was talking about, because it seemed like the elementary school version of a TED talk. Although all the other girls were nodding in unison, I was beyond confused. I decided to bombard her with questions, but only because of my ongoing investigation.

"What happened? I mean, are they okay? Did you see who it was?"

"C'mon May. There was a bloody tampon, so obviously someone had her period. You know what a *period* is, don't you?"

Claire whispered the word "period" the same way Maggie McPherson had whispered the word "sax" all those years ago, and there was no way I could let an opportunity like this pass by. If I wanted to remain undercover, I had to act natural. She seemed cocky, but two could play at that game.

"Yeah, I know what it is," I lied.

"Oh really. Well, what is it?"

"It goes at the end of a sentence, Claire."

Well, that was definitely the wrong answer, because the roar of laughter that followed damaged, no, *destroyed* my ego. Blood immediately rushed to my head and I felt the burning humiliation scorch my face and ears. I thought I could die right then and there, but Ms. Phelan miraculously stopped the laughter by telling the class to return to their seats. I swear I could've kissed her I was so thankful.

For the remainder of the day I was restless in my seat. How could I possibly focus after a conversation like that? What I needed to learn about wasn't English. I needed to figure out what the heck a period was, because it clearly had nothing to do with grammar. Ms. Phelan's lessons eventually transformed into a "wah-wah-wah" scene from *Charlie Brown*, and I decided to focus on what was truly important: creating a plan for when I finally escaped this prison and got home.

By the time 3:15 arrived and I finally opened my front door, I knew right where to go: the bathroom, specifically, my sisters' bathroom. I knew I checked there already, but I was positive that I must have missed something, anything. I plopped myself onto the fuzzy pink carpet and frantically threw open the familiar cupboards underneath the sink. After tossing everything onto the floor, I reexamined the evidence closely.

Thankfully, something new caught my eye. A box labeled "Always Pads" was hidden in a grocery bag, and I greedily ripped it open to examine its contents. After unwrapping the layers of thin plastic, I found myself con-

fused, yet again. They looked like diapers but were supposed to go in a bra? The design made absolutely no sense, and I was never going to stoop as low as a bra stuffer. Unimpressed, I tossed the box onto the ground and threw the opened pad in the trash.

That's when I saw it: the hint of red on another pad in the trash bin. It was pretty gross, I'm not gonna lie, but research is research, and I continued to stare at it with growing curiosity. Why would bra pads be bloody? Could this be like the blood Claire saw earlier? Did *my* sisters have what the girls called a period—A proper period, not the grammar one?

“May! What the heck! What are you doing with my stuff? Get out! NOW,” my sister Gretchen shrieked as if she found me with a dead body, which was pretty ironic, considering the blood in the trash.

“Well, it's too late now! I know what a *period* is,” I proudly retorted, although it was complete bologna. I was acting pretty dramatic, but I had to sell the lie. I really didn't want to be laughed at again, and maybe this time I could finally be considered an equal.

I guess my extensive research and web of lies did eventually work, but the whole secret detective thing ended up being pretty anticlimactic. The next day, I found a book on my bed titled, *The Care and Keeping of You: The Body Book for Younger Girls*. It was eye opening for sure, and after reading it, I immediately resigned from my detective job. After all that work, I finally realized the harsh truth: I was definitely *not* ready for womanhood, and to be honest, I probably never will be.