

## Portals

So you want to start over.

Good!

There's another universe somewhere, around the corner. Open the doors, and take a right at the rough road. Keep going through thickets of an alternate education, until you reach the transfer station, where you might find the turn for a hidden vocation. Hike through the heartbreak, clamber the rocky marriage, break bread at the friends' table. If clouds gather, seek out the tree canopy and shelter there from the gusts of a job loss. You'll be caring for others on the path; they'll be caring for you. (Make sure you don't all bring the same snacks.) After miles—in some universe, miles are synonymous with years—you'll make out a gate at the edge of a once-parched field. There might be snakes in the grass, but don't be deterred. You don't have to climb this gate, but you can. It is marked *disappointment*, but it is not impassable. Make your way over. It's Ok if you're not as limber as you once were. You may find the air and light changing. Your limbs loosening. Gaze steadying.

You'll know you have arrived when you begin to breathe more easily. You've sloughed off a few griefs without even noticing. I can't predict how the ambient sound will reach you, but you'll know it when you hear it. Crickets, birdsong, rustling in the underbrush. The lapping of lake water. Music of the spheres.

People call them parallel universes, as if worlds of possibilities were laid out in even lines, like the stripes on a T-shirt or the blue, steady bars in a notebook. It is the wrong phrase. Our language isn't quite ready for them. These alternate places, these outsider futures: they are not even and parallel, they're not geometric that way. They are more like ghost-companions, or shape-shifters. Irregular. Non-binary. Choose the word or phrase that works for you. The one that helps you to see them.

We are telling more and more stories about them, in our movies and our novels, our comics and graphics, the tales we share in the kitchen while we're assembling the next meal, or the ones we tell each other on our long morning trail walks. We are looking for the what-ifs, the might-have-beens. We redraw and rewrite ourselves: shedding new light on the images; curving the narrative.

Some ventures through the portals are personal. Redressing the private losses. And some are communal, when we see how we have narrowed and contaminated our infinitely beautiful surroundings, and wish for the earth to be otherwise. We are looking for escape. We want to undo the damage.

You'll find a universe meant for you, if you keep your eyes open. If you pay attention.

Take this door. Or the next one.

Keep your heart hopeful.