



## The Shape of More

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Sitting at my kitchen table, I dig my nails into each other while waiting for Raphael to call. Raphael is the financial advisor whom I don't feel grown-up enough, or moneyed enough, to have. I am a graduate student; I haven't saved for retirement since the years I worked full-time. But the responsibilities of adulthood persist even when income wanes, and so I look at the three-inch binder before me, stacked full of charts that palm-read my future through equities and bonds.

The binder's orderly parts are attributable to a partner I no longer have. The financial reports I've been receiving since my separation aren't hole-punched. They don't occupy their rightful place in the financial narrative of my life. They are stuffed into the binder's front flap, unopened and full of secrets about a future I don't know how to navigate.

My phone rings. I bite my lower lip as I pretend to keep up with Raphael's talk about the performance of this fund and the composition of that mandate. I want to say, *please slow down*. I want to say, *I don't know how to do this*. But I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual woman, recently separated, and in this moment I am reduced to a stereotype: another woman who let her husband take care of the money.

We review my portfolio. I resist interjecting. Raphael tells me where my money is going, and who I'm going to be because of its direction.

Then it happens. I see a colour-coded table that lists my lines of investment, and a single row stands out: energy. Suddenly, I'm alert. I'm here. And I am interrupting.

“Raphael,” I say, “about that...”

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When I met Anne Pasek, we were in the paint-chipped corridor of a university building. Heading in opposite directions, she to one conference talk, me to another, I wished her luck with words that were formulaic and forgettable.

We reconnected a year later, which was six months into the pandemic. I was working at the Environmental Media Lab, and we had started a journal. I asked Anne, whose work is in the cultural politics of climate change, if she would submit. I didn't know if I was expecting her to say yes or no, but I certainly wasn't expecting the warm reply she sent just a handful of days later offering up a zine she had recently completed that, in her words, observes the moments of everyday oil in Edmonton, Alberta. I looked at her drawings. I read the vignettes. We traded drafts and, in the process, well wishes, the words less formulaic with every email, about the move she was making across the country and the one I was making across town. When I uploaded her work, eventually, to the journal's site, I lingered on [what she had written about Petroleum Plaza](#): *I explain that I'm here to move all my accounts out of my old bank, which invested heavily in fossil fuels. The credit union employee smiles nervously and tells me that, this being Alberta, they also have their ties to the patch. They do have one 'ethical' fund, though that manager is only in on Thursdays.*

I thought about her willingness to publish this declaration. About her willingness to commit to something so challenging against the backdrop of a pandemic. Against the backdrop of Alberta. I imagined how much research Anne would have to do to find a new bank. I imagined how many condescending smiles she would endure before she did.

A few weeks later, Anne was one of the first to sign up for the lab's newsletter. She attended one of the first reading groups we held, and although there were only a few of us present in our chat, she showed up as though this was the most important conversation of her week. She was thoughtful and curious, and she said the kind of things that change the way I think.

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"Does energy mean oil and gas?" I ask.

"Yes," Raphael says. "Although as you'll see, you have just three percent invested in it."

I think about how little money this truly is. But even as I am having this thought, I am thinking about Anne.

I am also thinking about the pandemic. In the moments I take to fold my hands and formulate a response to Raphael’s assertion, I reflect on how small my work world has been since March 2020. I think about how many more events I had wanted to attend, how many more places I had wanted to go, how many more people I had wanted to meet. I realize, in this phone-silence, that “more” has driven my decision-making more than any other word. It also occurs to me that “more,” like so many of the words I study, is a misleading discourse.

By way of this realization, “more” begins to take a new, important shape. In the silence I sit in with Raphael, I remember my interactions with Anne, and I suspect these would not have happened had I been pursuing my former ideas of “more.” The lab has been cultivating a small network. We have cared, above all, about how we show up alongside and for the people with whom we work. Rather than going long, we have gone deep.

With the binder before me, its unopened envelopes leering at the direction my life once had, I’m still uneasy about my future. But the pandemic’s emphasis on *small* and *less*—a new kind of more—prompt me to think carefully about who I am going to be in the process of making it.

“I realize it’s a small amount of money,” I say. “And I want to move it.”

In response, Raphael tells me it will be difficult because divesting in this one area will have a domino effect on my other investments. To change just this three percent, we’ll have to change the other 97. I let him talk. I let him talk until he finally says, “Okay. We can do it.”

And we will.

I will.

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