

1. What was your first fandom you ever joined (if you were into a fandom). Did you read fic for it? Have you ever written fic?

My first, truest, and longest running fandom is The University of Tennessee Volunteers. My parents were alumni and when I was six we took this very cool road trip through Tennessee one summer. We stopped in Knoxville and went to the campus. I still, decades later, remember the way it felt to be there. Bright and filled with wonder. Towards the end of the tour, we took an elevator to the top of the humanities building. Up there was A window that looked out onto campus. You could see Neyland Stadium, Thompson Boling Arena, Circle Park and all the way down to the Tennessee River. I remember looking up at my dad, who was standing next to me and saying, meaning it with my whole chest, "I am going to go to the University of Tennessee when I grow up."

And I did. I didn't even apply anywhere else. And it was even better than I thought it was going to be. I am, at my core, a Vol for Life. My first and biggest fandom.

Out of curiosity I did some research to see if there is any University of Tennessee Volunteer fanfic - and I gotta say, we don't have a lot, but what we do have is all very queer and mostly involves sports legends banging each other. So, I feel pretty great about it. GO VOLS!

I have never written fic before, sadly. I didn't really discover fic until later in life and just never dove in to write any. I do love it though and think it is such an incredible training ground for fiction writers, and maybe especially genre fiction writers. Looking back on my life, if I had been into writing fic, here are the ships (and it would have been ships) I would have written for:

- Payton and Brook from One Tree Hill (I probably would have also included Haley eventually and gone full throuple, just if i am remembering my baby queer fantasies correctly.)
- Rory and Paris from Gilmore Girls (Imagine the enemies to lovers angst to be mined there - scholarship student and queen bee from all the money, it writes itself.)
- Callie and Arzonia from Grey's Anatomy (They were done so dirty, especially Callie, and it needs to be fixed. Luckily, this great fic writer oddcoupler22 has done the work and given them the love and affection they deserve)

2. First and foremost – *The Flight Risk* is so close to coming out! Want to give the elevator pitch of the book for anyone here who might not yet be familiar?

The Flight Risk is a modern retelling of the Red Thread of Fate. A love story about how sometimes the universe conspires for you, despite you. I do feel the need to make it clear that this is a love story, but it is not a traditional romance novel. However, there is an HEA, so no worries there.

3. What have you learned about yourself through writing?

Mary Oliver once wrote, “I read the way a person might swim, to save his or her life. I wrote that way too.” Writing is the only way I’ve ever been able to know any part of myself. When I could be fully me nowhere, I could be fully me on the page. I, sincerely, don’t know if I’d know any part of myself without writing and I know I would know no part of myself without reading. Stories saved me, and they keep saving me. It’s the purest magic I know.

4. As of now, publishing is a new journey for you – what pushed you to publish? What inspired you? Has it always been a dream?

I can’t remember a time when I wasn’t a person who was telling herself or writing stories. I would, sometimes, fantasize about publishing one day, but I never really thought it would happen. I was a person who wrote, but I never thought I’d be a published author. In fact, the only reason I am is because, very literally, my therapist made me. Well, my therapist bet me and the only thing I hate more than losing is being dishonorable about it. Being published was such a sacred dream I didn’t even let myself dream it. Living this moment now feels like something out of someone else’s life. I pinch myself all the time that I was able to put work into the world. What a gift.

5. Do you have a favorite idea that you haven’t yet written?

A fun fact about *The Flight Risk* is that it actually arose out of me working on another story. I started out writing an adult Rivers’ story and then Baylee came to me and absolutely demanded that her story be told.

So, that’s probably my favorite idea I haven’t written.

6. What is your favorite meal/meal of the day?

Unless I am going out with friends or in a situation where meals are provided, I very rarely have what anyone alive would consider a traditional meal. I am a snacky person. I like to graze. I think this is best evidenced by the fact my favorite food in the world is chips and salsa.

7. If you could have dinner with one writer, dead or alive, who would it be?

Mary Oliver without hesitation or question.

8. In *The Flight Risk*, we get such a full view of Baylee’s life, past and present. How did you approach writing this? Did you always know you wanted to write through her memories or did you debate writing through her life chronologically?

Honestly, it never occurred to me to write this story in chronological order. From the start, as soon as I realized I wanted to tell Baylee’s story, I knew for it to work the way I wanted it to, the reader would have to be as wholly in Baylee’s head as I could get them.

For me, a big part of being inside someone’s head, is to experience time as they experience it. I have always been so fascinated with the human temporal

experience. It is mind boggling to me that we are always in the present but also in the past and even project ourselves into the future. We live in the present, but rarely are we fully in the present. I write TFR as I did, because we are inside Baylee's brain and thus in the present and also in the past and also projecting into the future because that is how it feels to be inside someone's head. Or, at least, that is how it feels to be inside my head. The Flight Risk, insofar as it works, only works because you are experiencing exactly what Baylee is experiencing as she is experiencing it - her present, her past, and even her projected future.

9. Who is your favorite character in *The Flight Risk*? Which character would you most want to be friends with? If they're different choices, why?

This question had me spinning my wheels. I love all these wild and wonderful and perfectly broken humans. I think, cards on the table, Baylee is my favorite character. Not just because this is so much her story, but because of the way she approaches the world. And, I know this is unfair, but the character I'd most want to be friends with is adult Rivers. And I can't tell you why. But, maybe one day, you'll read why and you'll remember this and you'll think to yourself, "yeah, that totally tracks."

10. What book got you into reading?

The Missing Piece followed directly by The Missing Piece Meets the Big O by Shel Silverstein. They were the first two books I checked out at the public library where I grew up. It was the first time I experienced the magic of a book changing my life.

Lift. Pull. Flop.

11. What book got you into reading sapphic romance?

The first sapphic romance I read was Sparks Like Ours by Melissa Brayden. It was great, and for sure opened my eyes to the genre, but the book that tipped me over into a full blown obsession was Then & Now by Monica McCallan.

Then & Now, for me, is a perfect novel. It is written with breathtaking vulnerability, and made me feel seen in a way I've rarely felt ever. It lit a fire in me that is still burning. I'll never be able to thank McCallan enough for the gift of that novel and the way it changed my life.

12. If you could pick one song to epitomize your characters, what would it be? One song each, for as many characters as you'd like to answer with.

Baylee - Pancakes for Breakfast by Lizzy McAlpine

Harper - I'd Have to Think About It by Leith Ross

Tovi - this is me trying by Taylor Swift

Rivers - I'm Just a Kid by Simple Plan

13. What is your favorite Taylor Swift song and/or lyric?

Favorite Song: "All to Well (10 minute version)" tied with "the 1"

Favorite Lyric: "We can plant a memory garden / Say a solemn prayer, place a poppy in my hair / There's no morning glory, it was war, it wasn't fair"

14. Have you ever read a book – or fanfic – that is *criminally* underrated? Now is your chance to advertise it:

I will not just talk about In the Long Run. I will not just talk about In the Long Run. I will not just talk about In the Long Run.

It is absolutely mind boggling to me that Ana Hartnett Reichardt's *Catching Feelings* only has 149 ratings and 47 reviews on goodreads and just 60 reviews on Amazon. [I have written extensively about how much I love this novel.](#) Here I'll just say that Reichardt is a special writer, this is an exceptional book, and if you haven't yet read it please do so as soon as possible. I truly believe this is one of the best college based romance novels ever written - and is, for me, simply one of the best romance novels ever written.

15. You've discussed the red string of fate in terms of your book. Can you walk us through more about what it means and why that specific concept was so important to you in terms of your characters?

I have a complicated relationship with the idea of fate. I hate it and I love it. I grew up in a very fundamentalist environment - full on Southern Baptist - and had the concept of predetermination shoved down my throat for my entire growing up. It really soured me on the idea of fate. I needed, I still need, my choices to matter. I need to know, deep in my bones, that I am the captain of my fate and the master of my soul. I am a person who most feel self-determined.

I am also, undeniably, a mystic. I think it would be incredibly huberistic, and soplosistic, for me to think that there is nothing bigger than me at work in the universe. And I don't want to believe that bigger thing is just a cold, uncaring void. I want it to be magic. I want to believe that sometimes, and maybe more than sometimes, the universe is conspiring for me.

For me, the most acceptable and believable myth around fate is that of the red thread. There is something lovely, in my mind, about the universe being so insistent on you being loved well it ties you to the person who can love you best. And no matter what you do, it just keeps bringing you back to the soul best suited to loving yours. It doesn't make you love them. It doesn't make you choose them. But, given the chance, the universe will conspire for you, often times despite you.

I wanted to tell a story about fate, and choice, and a real, almost brutal optimism. A reckless and wild optimism. The kind of optimism that, when faced with world filled with all of the experiences, good and bad, sees hope. Sees a universe that wants you to be loved to badly it ties you to it, and refuses to let the string be cut - even by you.

16. What would you title your auto-biography?

Trying So Hard: The Macon Leigh Story

17. Finally – where would you put these characters on this seating chart:

Baylee Lawrence from *The Flight Risk* by you

Taylor Vandenberg from *In the Long Run* by me

Bennett Burke from *Then & Now* by Monica McCallan

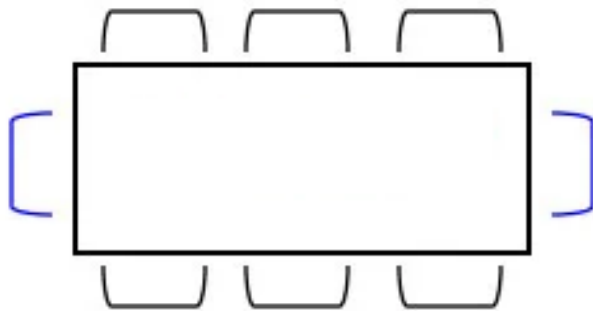
Maya Gonzalez from *Catching Feelings* by Ana Reinhardt

Arden Abbott from *Must Love Silence* by Lucy Bexley

Jamie Walker from *The Delicate Things We Make* by Melina McKay

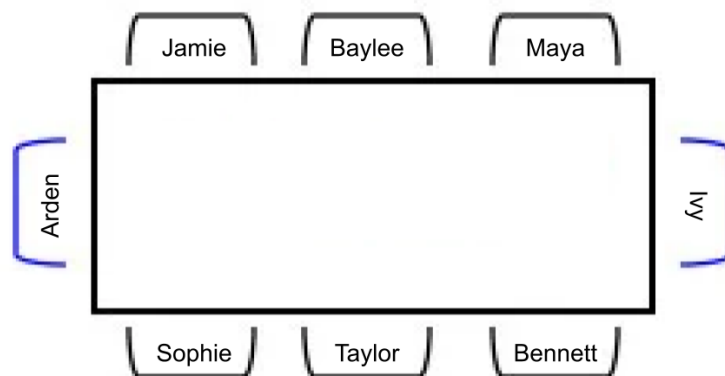
Ivy Holden from *Night Tide* by Anna Burke

Sophie Brunet from *The Romance Recipe* by Ruby Barrett



Explain your reasoning :)

A few assumptions: 1) this is for a dinner party, 2) the goal here is everyone having the best time possible, and 3) Maya is aged up 10 years so she can fully participate in all shenanigans that may occur.



Everyone always thinks the power position at the table is the head of the table, but I am a firm believer this is bullshit left over from monarchies and perpetuated by patriarchy. The real power positions at any given table are the middle seats. Those seats literally control the flow of conversation. It is the position that sets the tone. It is the position that decides if everyone is going to be included or if this is going to be one of those parties where the table is broken up into smaller groups having their own conversations. You want people in those positions that are inclusive by nature, extraverted, and genuinely want to be there and nowhere else.

The center seats with this group are Baylee and Taylor, no question. Taylor is charming and interested and genuinely wants to know and understand and learn. Baylee is an entertainer at heart and wants to make sure everyone has a great time. She is also a deeply interested person and loves nothing more than a good story. They both delight in the experience of being around and engaging with people and, as a rule, think people are pretty fucking rad.

Bennett knows how to be at an event, and is charming and comfortable in a group, but would come in guarded and feeling like she has to be Bennett Burke and not just Bennett, especially without Lily. I'd sit her on Taylor's right. Taylor will put her at ease and get her out of her armor, and, once out of her armor, Bennett is another great force for making sure everyone feels included in the conversation.

At the right head of the table, next to Bennett, is Ivy. Ivy also knows how to be at an event and has a very commanding presence, but is less inclined towards inclusion than Bennett. She is a great conversationalist, once engaged, but also is okay just observing. On Ivy's right is Maya. Maya is also commanding presence, one that can stand up to and breakthrough Ivy's occasional iciness. Maya and Ivy would also no doubt end up bonding over being insanely high achieving athletes and being forced to live up to absolutely outrageous familial standards, while still being very loved and accepted. Baylee would find Maya's intensity amusing and would be unable to not try and find the soft heart under all that fire. Maya would be annoyed by Baylee at first, but would ultimately fall prey to her charms. They end up staying in contact and Baylee for sure hires Maya to help with marketing and social media because she finds it tedious.

On Baylee's otherside is Jamie. There is no way that Baylee and Jamie aren't old friends who ran into each other doing features and have long history filled with many shenanigans in this universe. They just vibe together. Always have and always will. Next to Jamie is Arden who is bright and gregarious, but doesn't have to be the center of attention. She, Jamie, Baylee, and Taylor all bond over writing, but Arden and Sophie, who is on her right completing the table, end up becoming life long friends after this dinner. They bond over the pressure to live up to personas bigger than they are and being loved by women who make it feel safe to be both the big and small versions of themselves. Arden will write a novel with a chef as the heroine, and Sophie will create a dish called "The Picnic" inspired by Arden.

A Small Note: There is no way this party doesn't end in Taylor, Baylee, and Maya (yes Maya, trust me) talking everyone else into an adventure that for sure ends up with all of them spending a long weekend in Atlanta complete with a trip to The Claremont, lemon pepper wings, and breakfast at the Silver Skillet.