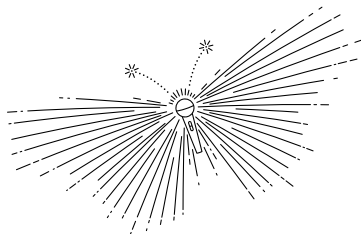


Occasional Magic

*True Stories of Defying
the Impossible*

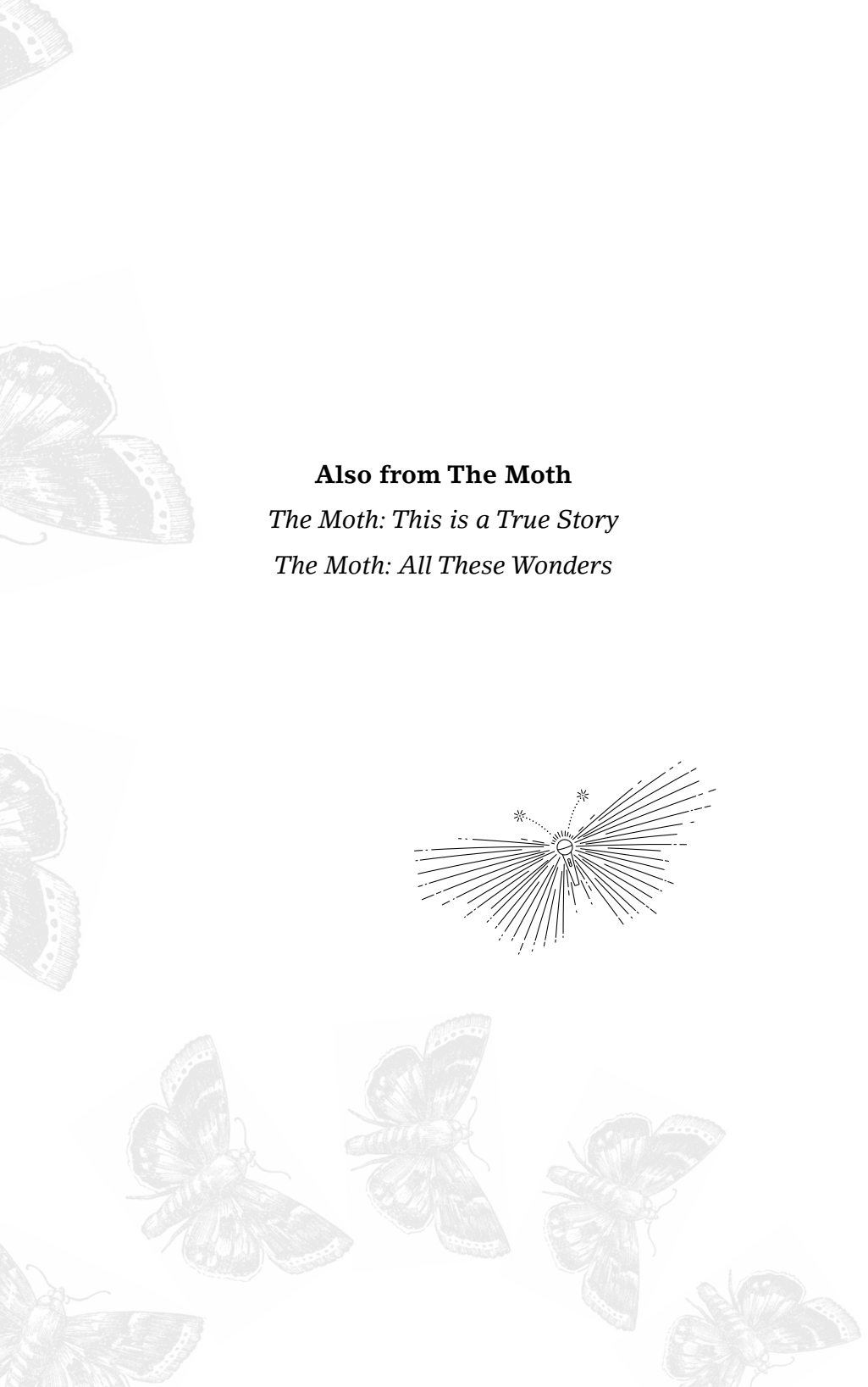
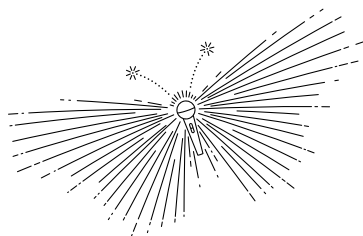
THE MOTH



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Occasional Magic

True Stories of Defying the Impossible

THE MOTH

EDITED BY

Catherine Burns





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FOREWORD

Meg Wolitzer

When I was first asked to be a storyteller at The Moth, a nonprofit that sends people out in front of audiences to tell their true stories, I was a little leery. The word “storyteller” made me uneasy; I pictured myself sitting somberly with a group of people in a circle, wearing a special storyteller cloak. But of course telling a story at The Moth is nothing like that.

It wasn’t that I was afraid of standing up before an audience. I’m a novelist, so reading aloud to a roomful of people (or even a handful of people and a loud bookstore cappuccino machine) is something I know how to do. But at The Moth you can’t hold notes. While the artistic director had been working with me on my piece, helping me turn it from an anecdote into a fully realized story, I was still hung up on the remembering part.

The Moth, which has become something of an international phenomenon, puts on story nights and slams and has worked with countless people from a variety of backgrounds, helping them sift through their own histories and think about what has mattered to them. At a Moth evening, which is often a lively and raucous event, you might find a country music icon, a dentist, an Iraqi interpreter, an Arctic explorer. You never know who or what will be in the mix.

I chose a story from my adolescence, which to me remains a startlingly vivid time. I tried hard to memorize all the parts of it, but in the days leading up to the big night, whenever I banished my husband from the living room and stood there with a timer, practicing, I found that I was leaving out entire chunks of story. I started to panic.

Then I realized that, instead of focusing on memorizing, I should focus on memory. I simply remembered the experience of being at summer camp in the 1970s, feeling young and excited and open. And once I really felt it all over again, I found the words. They weren't the exact same words as during my last rehearsal, but they weren't supposed to be. A Moth story is like a living thing: it changes and moves.

Finally, onstage under a spotlight in front of an enormous audience, I was like a better-coiffed, much older version of that girl I'd been at camp. I would say to anyone who is thinking of getting up onstage and telling a story: what you need to do, most of all, is feel like yourself. Once you do that, the words will come.

And also, as it turns out, the applause. I left the stage gratified, hot-faced, exorcised, thrilled, thinking, *I would do this again*. Hell, I would even do it wearing a special storyteller cloak.

Here, in this new collection, you will find fifty storytellers from all over the world. Some of them, I'm sure, experienced the same mix of nerves and excitement that I did when I walked up to the microphone. How fortunate we are that they were willing to channel their memories into these strong and radiant stories, and how wonderful it is that we now have the chance to read them here.



INTRODUCTION

Catherine Burns

The title of this collection, *Occasional Magic*, comes from a story told by Vietnam veteran Larry Kerr. It's about his intense love for a young woman named Omie, whom he describes as "smart, meltingly lovely, and strong, with a fierce belief in the possibility of occasional magic."

Occasional magic refers to those moments of beauty, wonder, and clarity, often stumbled upon, where we suddenly see a piece of truth about our life. As Moth directors we spend our days helping people shape their stories. We help people identify the most important moments of their lives (as we sometimes put it, "the moments when you became *you*") so the audience will understand why they mattered *so much*.

All the stories on the following pages were first told in front of live audiences. They showcase the great range of humanity – from a fifteen-year-old kid saving a life in Chicago to a Russian facing down the KGB – and cover all seven continents.

To select them we read transcriptions of hundreds of stories before narrowing it down to these fifty, which were chosen for their ability to convey emotion, humor, and vulnerability in print. They were then edited with an emphasis on preserving the live voices as much

as possible – so you'll find tense changes, sentence fragments, and even the occasional grammatical mistake.

The authenticity of those voices is what can make a show in a three-thousand-seat theater feel like being in someone's living room. The feeling that the person onstage isn't *presenting* a story, but *sharing* one, the same way we might with a friend over dinner. The warmth and investment of the audience is as much a part of the show as the stories themselves.

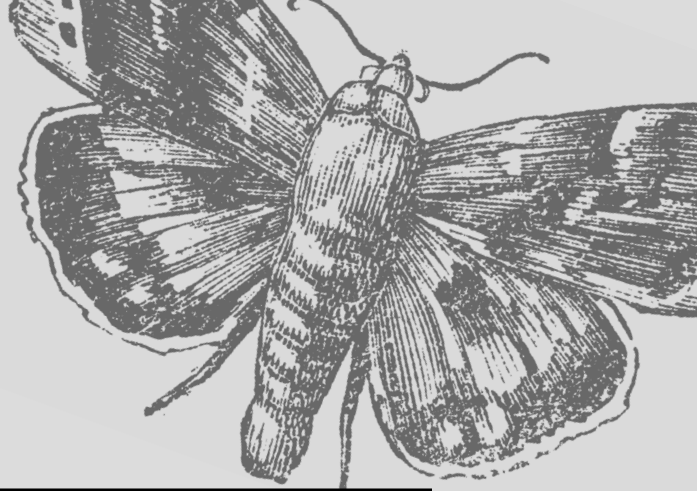
We will forever try to live up to the way British writer and Moth storyteller Lemn Sissay described the feel of Moth evenings: "Imagine The Moth to be an encampment in the desert. Take a seat. Someone will make space for you. It's dusk in the land of story. What's happening? Who knows? Someone's gonna stand up and speak? Something about their life – something that means something to them, something that may mean something to you. The sun dips and fires, rising stars spill across the sky like shoals of silver fish. You see there are as many small fires as there are stars. This is not an encampment. It is the world. The air is perfect body temperature. It is. The Moth is by the people, for the people. That's you."

For more than two decades, tens of thousands of people have shared stories on Moth stages around the world, and millions more have shown up with open hearts to listen.

If the warm response of Moth audiences assures us of anything, it's that empathy is alive and well in the world, and for that we have a reason to feel hopeful.

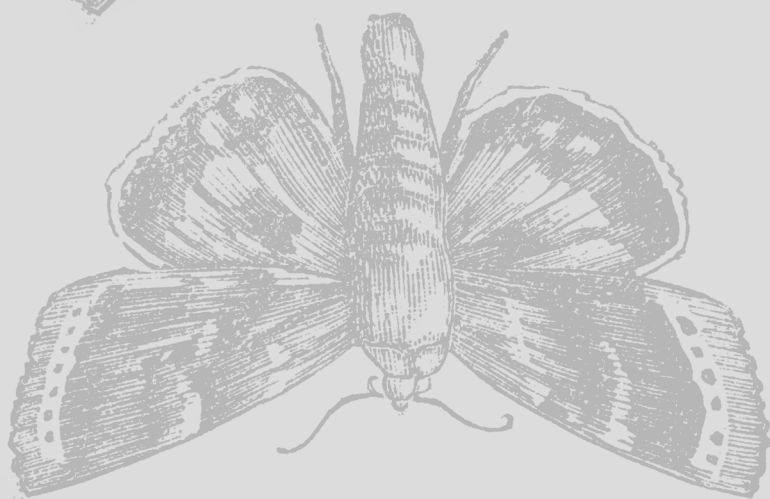
Catherine Burns is Artistic Director of The Moth

*To the stories that
give us perspective,
clarity, and hope.*



***Put Your
Curry Down,
Sweetheart***







Anaïs Bordier

So Much, and Enough

Growing up, I always felt that my birthday wasn't the day I was born, but rather the day I arrived in Paris. When I was three months old, my parents came to pick me up at Charles de Gaulle Airport, and this was the day we became a family.

I always knew I was adopted, and my mom told me that I was always in her heart, but that it was another woman who gave birth to me.

I grew up in the suburbs of Paris as an only child. I was a happy, balanced kid, but I could sometimes feel really lonely, and this loneliness couldn't be filled by friends. In darker moments I felt abandoned. I wondered if my birth parents didn't love me, and if that was the reason why they decided to put me up for adoption.

Whenever I had questions my parents would sit me down, take my adoption files out of the desk drawer, and start reading the story to me.

My birth parents were from Pusan. They met when they were really young, and they started dating, but my birth father had to leave Pusan for a job. My birth mother had gotten pregnant with me, and because of social stigma at the time in Korea – and that she wasn't married and she was still studying at university – she and her family decided to put me up for adoption.

I never felt the need to reach out to them or wanted to meet them because I had my mom and my dad who loved me. They were my real parents, so it didn't matter.

But one day, I had just turned twenty-five, and I was studying fashion at Central Saint Martins in London. My friend sent me a screenshot of a YouTube video featuring me, except I had never made such a video, and no one had filmed me. I clicked on the link and discovered a short, humorous video entitled *High School Virgin*.

It was made by a kid called KevJumba in Los Angeles, and it starred a girl who looked very much like me, except she had an American accent.

I was startled. I was trying to look for her name or a little bit of information about her, but there was nothing. And so I thought it was just a coincidence, and I dropped it.

Then, a few months later, my friend told me that he saw that "look-alike girl" again in a trailer for the film *21 & Over*. I found her credits in the cast list; she was listed as "Asian Girl." Her name was Samantha Futerman. She was an American actress who had been in films such as *Memoirs of a Geisha*. She was born in South Korea on the 19th of November, 1987.

I stopped right there. I thought I had read it wrong, because it said that she was born the same day as me.

So, we had the same birthdates, we looked really similar, except I knew my adoption records by heart, and I knew it had to be just a coincidence.

I really wanted to talk to my parents, so I immediately called them. As my mom got on the phone, she said, "Do you think she could be your twin sister?"

I was relieved because I thought I wasn't totally insane for thinking the same thing and now I felt I was allowed to think something that was supposed to be impossible.

Then I got my dad on the phone, and as I told him the same thingwards, he was Googling her, and found another website with a different birthdate. He told me that I must have got it wrong, but that it was indeed quite a funny coincidence. Except that, to me, it wasn't just a coincidence.

I couldn't really focus that day, I was just a zombie, wandering around. So I thought I would spend the rest of the day casually stalking her on social media.

I discovered that she was an American actress living in Los Angeles, that we were indeed born the same day, that she was also adopted from South Korea, and she recently had discovered that she wasn't born in Seoul, but in Busan. And I was also born in Busan.

So I decided I should try and reach out to her. But how do I do it? I didn't have her email address.

I could Tweet at her: "Hi. It seems we might be related, so private message me."

Didn't seem quite appropriate.

So I decided I would send her a friend request on Facebook, as well as a message, where I introduced myself quickly. I told her about the video, about the common birthdates and birthplace. I made a joke about *The Parent Trap* film and asked her not to freak out.

As I was waiting for her answer for three days, I started feeling really down and thought I was crazy. And then all of a sudden, I receive a notification on my phone saying that she had accepted my friend request.

My heart was beating. I was jumping all around, waiting for what she might say. She wasn't typing anything to me. She just sent me a picture of her adoption records. She also said that she didn't have much time to talk to me, but we would chat more in the coming days.

I had made first contact.

And as I was reading through her file, it confirmed that we were born the same day, the same year. We were both adopted from South Korea, both born in Pusan. But apart from this, none of our background stories matched. So I started thinking that maybe my dad was right, and maybe it was all just a coincidence.

For the next week I was looking at all her pictures, trying to discover what her life might be. And as we got to know each other a little more chatting on Facebook, we decided it was time to Skype.

And that was the weirdest experience. When both our faces appeared on the screen, I didn't know where to look. I was confused: which was her and which was me?

And I was like, "Uh, no, that's her."

We looked identical.

And where do you start? I wanted to say so many things that our Skype session lasted about three hours in the middle of the night. And when it was time to hang up, I didn't really want to.

As we were chatting more, she started feeling like a long-lost friend or a friend that you haven't seen in a while that you miss, except we had never met.

We decided it might be time to meet in person, but my dad, who was quite protective, said that we might want to take a DNA test before everyone got too emotionally involved.

We found a doctor that specialized in twins. She offered to help us with the DNA test results, but she warned us that there was a great chance we might be just doppelgängers. And it would take a few weeks to get the test results.

It was so intense that we decided, regardless of what the outcome might be, we really wanted to meet. So, we arranged to meet in London to get the test results together.

Samantha, her two older brothers and her parents flew from America, and my parents came from Paris.

I remember the day we were going to meet. I woke up, I got dressed, I was looking up at the sky, walking towards the Airbnb in Shoreditch, where we were supposed to meet. And I was thinking, *Oh my god, she might be in that plane right now. She's getting really close.*

So my parents and I get to the flat. And as I stood in front of the door, I could hear loud voices behind it, and I knew it was about to happen.

So I stepped into the room, and it felt like two parallel universes had suddenly merged together. She was sitting right in front of me. It looked like a mirror image of myself, except she wasn't moving as I was moving, so my brain had to readjust.

She started laughing hysterically. I did too.

We felt like two magnets that were attracted to each other, but also had this very special force that would repel us from each other.

My mom, who was standing behind me the whole time, said, "Oh my god, I have another daughter."

And my dad, who had been trying to warn us that we might be just doppelgängers, said, "Okay. I don't think you need a DNA test."

We then went for lunch, and we were just observing and staring at each other. Everyone was chatting, and we were amazed by our resemblance. We had the similar loud laughter, and our mannerisms were the same.

After all this emotion, I really needed to rest, and so did she, so when we got back to the Airbnb, we decided to take a nap together, in the same bed. That might seem quite strange, but at the time it felt really natural. We were just chatting, got tired, and fell asleep next to each other.

When I woke up, I felt this incredible sense of relief, because it felt as if we were being born again, but in the same world this time.

Later that evening, we sat down in front of our laptop, and we waited for Dr. Segal to call us on Skype.

She was quite serious. She looked at us and asked us to turn towards each other, and hug and kiss our identical twin sister.

She said, "DNA doesn't lie."

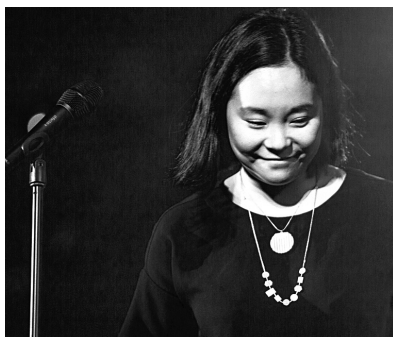
She had given us the final proof that this was all true.

We were really twins, separated at birth, adopted on two different continents, who had found each other through social media at twenty-five years old.

Today we still don't know what happened to our birth parents or why we were given up separately, or which of our stories is true. But I do know that I'm not that young girl who felt abandoned anymore.

I suddenly went from being an only child to having a twin sister, two older brothers, and even more parents living in America. Sam and I both have a big extended family, and this is so much, and enough, to be happy about.

The fact that we met is a miracle. But the most important thing is that, from now on, we have so much to live together. And we know that our lives are intertwined forever.



ANAÏS BORDIER is a thirty-year-old French designer. She was adopted from South Korea and grew up in Paris, where she graduated with a degree in textiles. She has further developed her creative skills studying fashion design at Central

Saint Martins in London. She also obtained an MBA in luxury brand marketing and is now working with her family for the French luxury leather goods company Jean Rousseau. Anaïs and her sister Samantha are the authors of the book *Separated @ Birth: A True Love Story of Twin Sisters Reunited* (Putnam/Berkley, 2014), unveiling the story behind their documentary film *Twinsters* (2015).