



RUCKUS

STUDENT LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE

SENIOR MANIFEST

SUMMER 2021

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Student Literary Magazine

The Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts

CONTRIBUTORS

Elijah Brown

Rheilley Carrasco Popovich

Shannon Cerruti

Kalaya Chamberlain

Madelyn Chase

Hannah Crouthamel

Marlee Davis

Brody DeFreest

Bethany Dominguez

Telma Felix

Madeline Foster

Dionisio Fowler

Rebecca Haller

Anjali Kavachery

Laurel Kracht

Ashley Lebron

Mercedes Lobb

Abigail Morris

Emily Rodriguez

Isabelle Schlegel

Sarah Stoll

Isabella Tita

Kiara Torres

ADVISOR

Heath Mensher, M.Ed.

Original Cover Art by Jackie Olson

THE LEHIGH VALLEY **CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL** FOR THE **ARTS**

Mission Statement

The Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts provides a unique environment that fosters a creative, rigorous academic approach to learning and a development of talents in the arts. Built on passion, discipline and a commitment to excellence, this integrative educational experience inspires all students to believe in who they are and in what they can accomplish.

The works contained within Ruckus are the artistic expressions of the individual members of the Literary Arts Program. This collection is not intended to be viewed as a statement about the views of ChArts as a whole. Some readings and other content in this magazine may include topics that some readers may find triggering and/or traumatizing. We apologize for any content which may be viewed as offensive.

We knew this was a special group. We teachers talked about it over the course of the past four years. Each of these seniors - these artists - brought something different to our Literary Arts major. For some, it was outstanding academics. Others brought spirit to our community of writers. Still others brought with them their force of personality, a unique voice that was singular to them. Each of these artists were vital to the whole. Each of these artists have something to say. My wish is that their distinct voices never be blunted. That each of our graduating students continue to grow. They are each sorely needed for the future.

Heath Mensher

Elijah Brown

Chapter One:

Yesterday's dreams are tomorrow's sighs.

-The Moody Blues

The pruned old man, donning a worn, collared shirt and off-white, cigarette-stained slacks, teared up at the sight of the waves at war with the shore. He reminisced of childhood, and how he used to look into the sea and dream of Atlantis. Now, he sees only the contents between the horizon. When his mind dives into the abyss, he gasps for air. The man sits on the pier with his wife, bundled up against him on a lonely bench.

His soul flew away with the wind.

Chapter Two:

Part One

Randy was a thinking man- always had been. He was always out on the town, though he never really left his mind. When he left his house, he'd bring his shoes, his keys, and a leather-backed journal. He wasn't a wealthy man, though he always seemed to have the money for some paper and a pen. It didn't matter if he was living under a bridge, in a penthouse, or on his deathbed, he'd find something to jot down. Hell, he could be trapped in the desert and he'd pour his thoughts into his notebook before he'd pour a drop of water into his mouth. He never really cared about relationships, as he was wed to his own world.

On his birthday, today, he spent the rainy day under the marquee of the town theatre's marquee. He used to act there, as a kid, but acting never really stuck with him. Anyways, the man sat there, cigarette in one hand, pen in the other, listening to the nearby bar playing their rainy day jazz. He pondered on the scenes the music struck up.

The pathetic trumpets looked like a field of wilted flowers, without a sunny day insight.

The piano strings sounded like a cluttered gutter, filled to the brim with built-up emotion. When the rain went on, the gutters finally let out.

As the sad singer cried for a long-lost lover, Randy took a long pull from his smoke.

He didn't know why he wished he could empathize with the song. He was too old to cry about some lost lover, he was sixty-seven now. And yet, there he sat, alone with only his shoes, his keys, and his journal.

Part Two

That night, he went to sleep in his quiet, one-room apartment. He dreamed of fields of flowers, pouring rain, and a woman he'd never meet.

He passed away contemplating the lost melodies, and his soul flew away with the notes.

Chapter Three

Everyone in the small port town loved Rich. He flew in on a golfing trip and loved the place so much that he decided to stay. Rich left his family behind, as the other seats were filled with his dollars and dimes. The luxurious man never felt bad about the situation, as his family just held him back. He lived in a four-story, ocean-front estate so grand that its shadow cast over the less luxurious, smaller neighboring apartments. Rich was a nice guy, donating his wealth to

the various libraries and such (for an even nicer tax write-off, I should mention.) The man lived a life most would envy, but at what cost? The high life is often a lonely one, and the dimes only made matters worse. Caved in by penny rolls, Franklins, and glittering gold bars, Rich no longer had access to the outside world. The instant gratification of another decimal point removed the need to feel pain, and he'd ride off the thrill until the next. With all of the money in the world, Rich was still indebted to the clock.

His gold-plated lungs slowly deflated with air, and his dirt-poor soul struggled to escape.

Chapter Four

Removed from their demons

The spirits glanced down.

Bodies of energy

Removed from ego

Reminiscing on

What once was.

On their deathbed,

They rot.

As the Holter

Goes mute,

A smile shines

Upon their faces.

Rheilly Carrasco Popovich

my
feet are planted in the sand
body is afloat
the waves playing a game of tug of war with my fragile being
the ocean
throws off my center of gravity at its own expense
roaring waters crash onto the shore,
but i am far from land.
so far that i can't even remember what it feels like to not be floating
in the middle of an unpredictable yet beautiful force
i could be swimming back to land,
but id rather float here and accept reality
and maybe take in the views
surrounded by a multitude of blue hues
im gonna ride this one out.
blue

Shannon Cerruti

sun

the glow that spills from the gap
between the frame and rainbow door
a light that once roused a smile
a feeling sunlight brings no more

the familiar carpet pressed
between the toes on both her feet
which once was trod upon lightly
by childish steps and spins and leaps

now is sunken in much deeper
by one who stands in place and stares
ahead at a once familiar reflection
thinking words she'd never share

eyes like pits of empty space
which often meet the ground
where gleams of golden brown were held

and sparkle once was found

and as the story often goes

familiar poetry and prose

full of “why”s and “only if”s

endless times and feelings missed

desperate gropes at the string of

memories unraveling

the faded summer, distant fall

the bliss of winter, smell of spring

though her fingers reach and stretch they

never quite seem to grasp

those days that promised her eternal

and whispered lies that they would last

as she travels up and down

her face distorting at the gaze

she breaks the stare to see the wall

once bright now hid with muted greys

but though she tried to cover up

the liberated crayon scrawls
a flower drawn by smaller hands
is seen peeking through the walls

so she dries up hidden tears
that mourn the loss of childhood years
she turns to look, and on display
the sun which shines like yesterday

Kalaya Chamberlain

Whispers in Between Lines

My nap was still. No images flashed through my mind nor did I feel any sensations in my body. The window was open, which allowed a soft breeze to flutter through my curtains. The sun had set, and the moon was hiding behind the clouds. If I was into photography, I would have taken a picture of it. When I glanced around my room, I realized the lights were off. It made my heart jump a little because I was terrified of the dark. I took deep breaths as I approached the light switch and turned on the light.

The house was covered in a blanket of darkness due to the fact that most of the lights were out. My chest was aching the whole time as I navigated through the darkened mansion. The kitchen was empty when I entered it. This is where Frederick usually hung out when he was dancing or making something for me to eat, since the rest of my family was rarely home. I sighed as I sat down at the counter and stared at the wall. Sometimes I didn't mind being by myself but other times, I just wanted someone to talk. A living being would be best for that. I bother the ghosts too much. My parents were out with my sister a lot on "business trips" as they liked to call them. My brother moved to California once he graduated high school. Everyone else around doesn't particularly like me so I guess I got the short end of the stick when it came to having a social life.

My stomach rumbled. I usually had an after-school snack that Frederick makes me but I ended up falling asleep. When I looked inside of the fridge, there was a plate of spaghetti just for me. He wrote my name on it as if anyone else was here to eat it. I sat down to eat it after heating

it up. Nothing much was going through my head at the moment except for the fact that I felt very lonely. Which was crazy to think about. After spending so much time by myself, one would think that I would be used to this feeling by now. I placed my plate in the sink once I was finished eating. Now was as good of a time as ever to grab a book to read.

I marched up the stairs and walked towards the door that led to the bridge that connected the mansion and the library. The walls of the bridge had huge windows built into them. Even the floor of the bridges was made out of glass. I could see the stream running under it. The brightness of the moon made it possible to see little frogs and tadpoles that dwelled in this stream. I've never really liked frogs. I've always thought that they were ugly and annoying but these ones were alright I guess.

As I reached the other side of the bridge, I opened the double doors that led into the library. I liked the way they creaked. It made the mansion feel old like something out of a novel. I've spent a lot of my time in the library, getting lost in worlds written in between pages. Sometimes I would stop reading for a while because I would envy the characters that I would read about. How they get to live in worlds full of magic and wonder meanwhile I was stuck in this reality. There was this one series that I was currently reading that was taking me forever to finish. It's one of the longest that I've ever attempted to read. I walked around the library and tried to remember where I last placed the second book. I picked it up and checked to see if my bookmark was still in there before I sat down at one of the window seats and used the moon as my source of light, even though I had turned on enough of the lights in the library to not be scared.

I sat there for a while, determined to not get up until I was done reading the book. Once I was done, I guessed that not more than an hour had passed since I started reading, but I couldn't

use my phone to check because it was dead. I put the book back on the shelf where it belonged. My books were one of the few things that I made sure to take care of. As I walked towards the exit of the library, I heard something behind me, but when I turned around I didn't see anything.

I found you . . .

I shook my head and figured that I was just imagining things. As I placed my hand on the doorknob to turn it, I felt a hand move the hair from the back of my neck before a pair of lips kissed it. I froze, but my heart was going a mile a minute and I didn't know what to do. I couldn't call anyone for help and I'm pretty sure if I ran, the person would catch up to me in no time. Just then, the door opened and Frederick was standing there.

“You okay? You look like you've seen a ghost.”

“What are you-”

I turned around but whoever was there was gone.

Madelyn Chase

The Last Night

“So here’s the deal,” Nick said slowly, wiping his hands with a napkin and getting up to toss his trash. They’d been finished with their takeout for a few minutes and he was already leveling with her, trying not to raise her hackles.

Too late. Hackles raised. She set down her empty cup and waited stiffly for him to continue.

“Sylvia’s attorney called again to set up the first meeting. I said we could do it tomorrow. Tomorrow still works okay with your schedule, right?”

Something acrid dripped into Adrien’s mouth; she felt venomous.

“I’m sorry I can’t get you out of it this time, but honestly? I don’t think I’d want to. It’ll be good to just bite the bullet, see what we’re working with. I’ve had grandmother’s be plenty cooperative in the past.”

She ignored him rather pointedly and watched a pigeon walk past.

He ducked down into her line of sight. “Hey, I’ve supported you in this and will continue to regardless of the way you decide to go. You want to give up custody? We can arrange that. You want partial? We’ll work out a deal. You want full custody? We go for full custody. But for me to support a decision, you have to make a decision.”

He sat down and stretched his hand out on the back of the bench just far enough to squeeze her shoulder. “I don’t mean to sound harsh. I just want to be real about the situation. You gonna be okay, Cooper?”

She held a thumbs up.

Not for the first time in her life, she felt very uniquely cursed.

She couldn’t stop thinking about her family. How her mom left and forced young Lilly to raise Adrien and how Lilly left and is forcing Adrien to raise Meg. How they’re all messed up in different ways and Adrien can’t promise she won’t mess Meg up too. She loves her, truly. She’d never try to hurt her.

But she has learned there is a whole lot more that goes into parenting than love.

It’s possible there was no curse, just an unbreakable cycle of women in her family of becoming mothers when they shouldn’t be.

Adrien didn't know if she wanted to be the one to break it. She had thought about running away her whole childhood, and when she finally did, it just chased her here. The past had legs.

If she tried to avoid this, who's to say it wouldn't just follow her wherever she went next.

She kept her eyes on the shifting pond, feeling uncomfortably choked up. She pulled her legs up on the bench and wrapped her arms around them, nails grazing at the pink seams of her coveralls.

"How old were you?" Nick asked quietly. "When she left?"

They'd never talked about her mom before, not head on, but he knew enough to know Adrien was thinking about her.

"Almost seven. She left a couple days before my birthday."

She turned to face him. He looked kind and unselfish, but older now. She still couldn't tell if he had grown up to be a good man or just a good lawyer.

She hoped he was both.

Her voice was hoarse when she tried to speak. "It sounds bad, doesn't it?"

"Not because of you," he said, reaching instantly for her hand. "You were a kid."

She was a terror. That much she remembered. Breaking furniture, cracking glasses, and talking in class until she was suspended. When she looked hard enough, there was no wonder why her mother had left; Adrien was a bad seed.

"I don't want to be like her," she admitted.

"You won't be."

He sounded so sure. Adrien wanted to cling to his words and not let go.

"How do you know?"

"I just know."

"I'm a bad person."

"Adrien, you're not. I know-"

"But I don't want to leave Meg. She's Lilly's daughter. Did you know I named her?"

She was being honest with him. On the last night to decide what she wanted, what was best for all of them, for the rest of their lives, she had little more than impulse to go off.

Nick's face broke into a smile. "I think this is a good decision."

"You haven't been paying attention then."

"I pay plenty of attention to you."

She could tell it was meant to be lighthearted, but it came out heavy, stifling. They looked at each other for a long moment before Adrien got her head on right. She laughed a little as she stood up. “I think I should head home. We probably have to meet pretty early tomorrow, you know, get settled and all that.”

“Eight thirty, at my office,” Nick said, sounding far away.

Adrien took her bag from the bench and started down the path, calling out over her shoulder. “See you then!”

The apartment was dark when she stepped inside, but she heard the now familiar steps of Meg’s sitter ambling down the hallway and into the main room.

Linda smiled when she saw Adrien. “She went to bed maybe an hour ago. I just checked on her and she’s still fast asleep. Easy night for Aunt Adrien, huh?”

“Thank you so much, Linda. You’re the best.”

Linda pulled on her coat and kissed Adrien’s cheek. “Have a nice night, dear.”

“You too. Stay warm.”

And she was gone.

Adrien picked her way across the pitch dark apartment and into the hallway, stumbling around it’s unfamiliar edges until she got to Meg’s room.

She pressed the door open and let herself in, stopping just short of the bed. Meg woke up with a start, eyes scanning the dim room for the disturbance.

“Adrien,” she whispered, catching sight of her. She stretched out of her tucked sheets and held a hand up for Adrien to hold.

“Hey, my girl. I missed you. How were you for Ms. Linda?”

“Good. We did homework. I know all my time tables now.”

“Wow! I’m so proud. Smarter than me already.”

Meg smiled.

“Maybe you want to become a mathematician instead of a chef now?” Adrien said, pinching Meg’s cheek. She laughed and squirmed away, pressing her face into the covers.

“No,” Meg said, curling back under her blankets, looking half asleep again already. “I’m gonna make waffles tomorrow. Lots of syrup.”

“Sounds like a plan. We’ve gotta get up early though, we have a big day.”

Meg blinked slowly, struggling to stay awake. “We do?”

“We do, Chef Meg. But it'll be okay. Get some sleep.”

Meg's grip on Adrien loosened as her eyes shut.

Adrien stood up after a long moment and tucked the blanket a little tighter around Meg. In the quiet, velvet dark, she could finally take a look at her for the first time all day. Her hair spilled onto her face like ink, pooling around the baby fat left over on her cheeks. She was olive toned but pale now, during the winter, the way Adrien always got. She felt the thread between her and Meg tug a little.

She slipped quietly out of her room and shut the door behind her. Then, turned inside out with fear and want and sadness and joy, she slid down the wall and crumpled into herself.

Hannah Crouthamel

Solace

I laid sprawled out, facing towards the star-lit sky. The summer humidity made my arms and legs stick to the trampoline. My eyes were fixed on the stars and I was squinting in an attempt to make them clearer.

Suddenly, I heard footsteps on the grass, thumping in my direction. I lifted my head to see my sister leaping onto the trampoline. My whole body bounced and I sat up mid-air.

“I came to stargaze with you,” she said. I smiled at her, analyzing her face. “Come on,” she said as she crawled next to me and patted her hand, motioning for me to lay back down. I positioned myself under her arm, she wrapped it around me tightly.

We laid silent for a while. I gazed upon the stars, wondering if we were looking at the same ones. I listened to her breathing and tried to match it. I was never someone who was able to make out the constellations, although I wish I could. But it seemed as if the big and small dipper were all over the sky and I could never remember the other patterns or when they were supposed to be visible.

Her arm wrapped tighter around me.

“Do you ever wonder if there’s life out there?”

“Sometimes.” I said. In reality, I thought of it quite often. I was almost positive there is life out there, we can’t possibly be all alone in this universe. Sometimes, I wonder if I’m looking at the same star as someone else, light-years away.

I stepped outside onto my porch and am hit with a cold breeze. I can see my breath leaving my nose as I look out. My four sisters are laying down on a blanket across the wood, smooshed together for warmth. They’re laughing about something. I guess I missed the memo.

“Hey,” Jordan looked up at me, “there’s a meteor shower tonight, we came out to watch it.”

Everyone else was quiet, they didn’t look at me.

“We can move over if ya want.” I shook my head and sat down by the door, straining my neck to see the sky. It was a clear night that night, it hadn’t been in a while. I wrapped my arms around myself in an attempt to get warmer, the wind was making my eyes hurt.

Suddenly, they gasped and pointed upwards towards the sky. “That one was huge!” I missed it. I strained my neck to try and catch a glimpse. I felt a lump in my throat and my eyes watered a little. *Not now, not here, and not definitely now.* I cleared my throat and blinked as fast as I could, still trying not to miss anything.

A few more had passed but above my house, I missed them again. The lump grew larger in my throat. I brought my head down to try and stop myself from crying. My sisters are all bundled up together, eyes fixed on the stars. A tear falls onto my face. I wipe it on my jacket sleeve. I look back up the sky, hoping one will pass in my little bubble of vision.

After what felt like eons of silence, a white streak passed by above me. My sisters gasp again and point. It was so fast I thought it hadn’t happened, but their reactions affirmed that it was real. I was more content now that I had seen one. But the lump in my throat was still there and I found myself having to blink away more and more tears. It was impossible to see the stars through them.

I quietly got up and stepped inside. I held my breath and began to walk to the bathroom. I stepped inside and quickly locked the door behind me. I burst into tears and I let my breath finally go. My vision was blurry. I stumbled to the shower and turned it on, then sat down on the floor.

The bathroom window was open and I could hear them giggling. The tears only came down faster. The laughing was taunting me and I felt more alone than I had in a long time. I hugged my knees and wiped my tears on my hand.

I allowed myself to let out a few more cries before grabbing a wad of toilet paper and blowing my nose. I slowly stood up and carried myself to the window. I paused to take one last glance at the night sky.

I couldn’t help but hope that in some alternate universe I was cuddled up with my sisters on the porch, staring at the same stars I am now.

Marlee Davis

convenience stores are obsolete

one afternoon i made my way to the market, in search of pearls and gunpowder and a strawberry sundae. when i arrived, the man at the counter told me they had none of that, but they had ice pops in the case by the soda fountain. i made my way home 80 cents poorer but with raspberry syrup dripping from my lips. syringes litter the pavement and i imagine injecting the melted popsicle into my veins, so that every time a mosquito bit into my ankle she would tell her friends of the sweetest blood she has ever tasted. i step over them.

the next morning i went to a store across town, in search of eucalyptus and crayons and brown sugar. i returned home with a pack of cheap sidewalk chalk, and i traced the clouds powder blue as they floated overhead.

as i draw the sky onto my driveway, my mother comes to let me know of his arrest. hit-and-run, she says. cocaine and ecstasy and heroin. she closes the door just as i finish the UFO that hovered above my head a moment ago. i think of the needles, of the melted raspberry and the mosquito who brags about me to her friends.

i go in for a glass of lemonade.

neutrality and other things that kill

hands.

hands of those supposed to protect us.

angry hands

violent hands

pale hands striking brown skin

white knuckles against a dark baton

white noise in solitary confinement.

confinement.
no art in our schools
no teachers that look like us.
no career options but war.
war.
land of the free
home of the chained.
the cia sold more crack than
anyone in prison ever did.

prison.
locked up by the masses
caged like animals
the stares of the guards
enough to strip you of hope.

stares.
bystanders watch but
never act when
our lives are on the line.

so when you tell me
you do not like to take sides
you are ignoring our cries.
when you tell me
politics do not matter
that they should not end friendships
you are telling me politeness
matters more than our lives.

but i am telling you that your indifference

is just as deadly as police are.
as mass incarceration is.
your neutrality is
a lethal injection
in the veins of
black and brown beings.

Brody DeFreest

Cursive lies

I'll pace around in my empty mind, and make up lies to fill in the blanks.

And I'll tell you I love you even though I don't know what that feels like.

I promise to cover up my scars with some stupid tattoo that means absolutely nothing.

But when people ask what they mean I will tell a beautiful story about my childhood.

A childhood that I don't really remember, and the characters in the story will be far more complex than the ones that played out in real life.

I promise to study the way people love so I can make you feel safe and happy for as long as you let me.

Even though I promise all these things

I am not sure I'll mean them tomorrow

Honestly I am not sure I have ever meant anything I've said

I learned to write lies so beautiful that people fell in love with the poem they wanted to hear

Beautiful cursive lies that read like their favorite book

I am an writer

I write a book for every new person that enters my life

Each word deliberately applied for their pleasure

So when I say I love you,

Just know that it's a cursive lie

Bethany Dominguez

Radio Ready

Strange. Everything has just been strange, especially for Vice President Gonzales. He has been attending meeting after meeting discussing the repercussions of a new epidemic going around. People are looking to him and President Diamond to provide answers, answers that neither of them possesses.

Striding through the WDCN-FM Radio studio entrance, VP Gonzales flashes his charming smile as he is greeted by the radio producer.

“On time as always, Mr. Vice President.”

“Can’t let them down.”

“For the people, right?”

“For the people.” The two shake hands.

“If you would follow me,” says the radio producer, leading Gonzales into a recording studio.

An announcer is already in the room discussing projected weather patterns for the upcoming week. Familiar with this routine, Gonzales slips into a chair on the other side of the table, facing the announcer.

“—With winds up to 10 miles per hour on Saturday. Now for a news update. Today, we have a treat for all of you who are tuning in to WDCN-FM Radio. Many of you may be wondering ‘What in the world has been going on these past few weeks?’ I am excited to announce that Vice President Roberto Gonzales is here with me to provide an update on these bewildering current events.” The radio announcer nods toward Gonzales.

“Hello, everyone. Some of you may have heard my last report on the airline incident. For those who haven’t, President Diamond and I have been working with our lead detective to find a trend between these concerning occurrences. Last week we announced our first suspect and yesterday afternoon we uncovered additional suspects that may be correlated with the first.”

“So tune in Wednesday at 2 o’clock to learn more about these suspects.” The radio announcer smirks at Gonzales.

“You got that, Mikey. Also, tune in at 3 o’clock on Friday to hear the results of the court case.” Gonzales returns the gesture.

“And that is something you guys don’t wanna miss, so don’t forget to tune in to WDCN-FM Radio Wednesday at 2 o’clock and Friday at 3.”

Gonzales clears his throat and leans closer to the microphone.

“Now, these discoveries only mean one thing. For those just tuning in, I want you guys to turn up the volume and listen closely. These occurrences were not spontaneous, they were planned. People talk about a new epidemic going around, but there is no such thing. Believing this nonsense just excuses criminals, like our suspects, for their voluntary actions. It encourages your children to misbehave as you blame this ‘disease’ instead of holding them accountable. There is no illness; there is just a lack of control and order.”

“And there you have it, folks. Vice President Gonzales’s take on this apparently imaginary epidemic. I am Mikey Lee and thank you, as always, for tuning in to WDCN-FM Radio.” The radio announcer cuts the stream.

“Interesting accusation, Vice President.”

“I am just stating the facts. The people deserve to know the truth,” VP Gonzales says as he checks his watch. “Well I better get going, I have another meeting in about an hour.”

After a series of handshakes, Gonzales pushes through the double doors and speedwalks toward his limousine, the soles of his shoes clicking in rhythm.

“Ready to go, Mr. Vice President?”

Gonzales nods his head. “You think you can get me there on time?”

“When have I ever let you down?” The two men exchange smirks.

As the jet black limousine slowly backs out of the parking lot, Mr. Gonzales pulls out his phone and dials President Diamond’s number. He repeatedly checks his watch, anxiously bouncing his leg as he waits for the President to pick up.

“Hello?”

“Madam President, I have just left the radio station. I should be there in about twenty minutes.”

“Thank you, Roberto, I will see you then.” She hangs up the phone.

Finally in the Oval Office, Gonzales shakes hands with President Diamond.

“Please, take a seat.” President Diamond gestures toward a chair on the opposite side of her desk. She sits down, facing him.

Gonzales carefully lowers himself into the chair, trying not to wrinkle his freshly ironed suit. President Diamond smiles at him.

“So, I was listening to your segment on the radio this morning.”

“Thoughts?”

“I am very impressed.”

“Why thank you, Madam President. I—”

“I didn’t know you were qualified to make such grandiose statements.” President Diamond folds her arms and glares at Gonzales. Her smile has faded.

“Madam Pre—”

“I told you that we should look more into it before we make any conclusions.”

Gonzales takes a slow breath as he crosses his own arms.

“May I point out that citizens across the country are panicking? I tried to ease their worries in an attempt to bring order.”

“By lying?”

“It was an inference based on our observations.”

“So a guess...” President Diamond’s stone-cold stare pierces through Gonzales’s skin.

“Cor—” Gonzales clears his throat, “Correct, an educated guess that gives more power and control to the people. I’d rather believe I have the ability to fight or even prevent these ongoing ‘symptoms’ instead of mindlessly submitting to an ‘epidemic.’”

“And what if you are feeding them false hope?”

“At least there would be hope. We can’t wait around forever, Madam President. The people need our validation in order to carry on.”

President Diamond unfolds her arms and leans toward Gonzales.

“This ‘validation’ does not cover the fact that people are dying. Americans should be taking precautions in order to protect themselves and others.”

“What precautions? How can we fight something if we don’t know how it operates? If it even exists, of course.”

President Diamond leans back in her chair.

“I don’t know. Maybe if people stayed home, it would minimize the risk of being attacked or even attacking themselves and others.”

Gonzales laughs to himself.

“And you believe those under this imaginary influence will listen to you? They are freely breaking the law.”

President Diamond freezes and takes a moment to think.

“What about those who aren’t infected? They should be aware of the potential dangers around them,” she finally says, her voice filled with compassion.

“We can’t risk a nationwide panic. It would destroy our economy; it would rip us away from our loved ones; it would bring more disorder and chaos.” With every example, Gonzales taps a finger on his left hand.

“Aren’t the lives and safety of millions of Americans more important?”

“Not if they have nothing to live for. I am not willing to risk national destruction for something that is not yet scientifically proven. I guarantee you, it is all in their heads. Once everyone realizes they have control over their actions and that those actions have consequences, everything will be back to normal.”

“So you are going to continue preaching this nonsense?”

Gonzales raises his right brow.

“You mean providing hope for Americans across the nation?”

“You can conclude what you want, Gonzales.” President Diamond throws her hands in the air. “But don’t you even think about dragging me down with you. I don’t want my name on any of this. Am I clear?”

Gonzales reluctantly nods.

“Good. On Wednesday, you can announce my disapproval concerning your theories.”

“Very well. Is there anything else, Madam President?”

President Diamond checks her watch. “Detective Whitman should be here any minute.”

Telma Felix

Three friends at breakfast after a party. Monica, Alexa and Kali.

Monica: *This chair is so hard. I feel so gross and my head hurts. If I hadn't drank so much I wouldn't be in any of this mess. Well, I guess it's not really a mess because he doesn't know yet. I still feel like I should just come clean to him because that's the right thing to do, right? I'm supposed to have honest and open communication with my boyfriend, right? I'm also not supposed to get absolutely hammered at a party and kiss someone else. I'm so hungry but my stomach is so sick so I probably shouldn't eat. Actually I'm thirsty, should I call the waiter over here? Why is Alexa so fixated on her phone? I probably shouldn't have worn this shirt, it's freezing in this place. I don't wanna face Rico, but I wanna be honest with him because I know he would be honest with me too. It was just a kiss, that's not even that big of deal. Everyone kisses, he's probably kissed a million girls before. It's not a big deal, I might as well tell him.*

Alexa: *So now Djamel is texting me about Monica too? How many people saw her? This is just making things worse because it's gonna be so hard for her to deny this whole thing. Really Mo, you had to kiss him? Cheating is wrong either way but kissing is so intimate. She doesn't have to tell Rico, he's been cheating on her for the longest and never once has he even thought about telling her. I'm so hungry, but no one else has ordered and I don't want to be the only one eating. Why is the AC on in here? It's not even hot outside. I totally forgot that Kali was here. I can tell Mo is overthinking this whole thing. I also know she wants to tell him, but that would be the biggest mistake ever. I know Rico would leave her and make sure she's labeled the biggest whore in the school, even though he knows he has done much worse to her.*

Kali: *Why is it so cold in this stupid diner? I didn't even want to come here but Alexa dragged me here because I have to be a "supportive friend". Supportive of what? The fact that Rico and Monica are terrible for each other? Monica lives in a fantasy and actually believes that Rico values her. She's also taking advice from Alexa? Alexa plays with boys like it's a game. She doesn't even have feelings for half the guys she talks to. She just uses them for validation because she's terribly insecure. I am so hungry but everytime I eat, Alexa has to say something about my weight. Monica just goes along with whatever Alexa says so she's going to end up feeling guilty anyway. Quite frankly, I don't care what happens to Rico and Monica's superficial relationship. Secretly Alexa doesn't even want to help Monica out, she just likes to hear other people's problems to feel better about her own. Actually, I think I'm just going to get up and go home. I'll say I'm feeling sick or something.*

Madeline Foster

The 12th House

i see you behind me in the mirror, watch your face follow me in the passing train windows
feel your cold hands in my hair
while the soap swirls around my knees
the bathwater cooling with your mildew breath,

run

the bathwater dripping off the ends of your hair whipping in the wind behind you
the wind flicking the water off your naked body
turning blue in the winter silence
you almost wish people would
look
but they never do
so you keep running

you run past your father
holding his arms out to you -
like he did when you were a kid,
and he holds his arms out to hold you in his grimy flannel, his beard scratching the top of your
forehead and comforting you in that uncomfortable way

and you run

you run past your family
who watch you from a distant familiar place
like an acquaintance you've met too many times
they love you, in that soft useless way
they bend in the breeze like the bamboo in your dead grandmother's yard
they love you like they'll never know you

and you run

you run past your mother

who has a sickly green glow that she's carried your whole life

she stood at the kitchen sink, an empty green halo from the incandescent bulbs that flickered out
twice a day that curls around her hair,

and her hands chapped from the water that only stayed warm long enough for one shower

and she always let you go first

and she always tried to love you,

you run

you run so hard you can't feel the ice biting into the bare skin of your feet

the bloody footprints the only evidence you were ever there

and you run

you run so fast the bushes and thorns slice into,

but they could never compare to the pain in your head

so you keep running

run naked through the december forest at

and you miss the summer so much it hurts to breathe

it hurts your heart to beat

you miss the chlorine days and the dizzy highs and the lows and the chaos and the tragedy

you miss holding your best friend so tightly it felt like there was no room between your souls

and you miss the ash in your mouth as you passed her the wine and wiped your scarlet lips in a
cheetah print dress

and you stole lipstick and painted your face with glitter

and drove with all the windows down and the music all the way up

and

you miss living

so you run

Dionisio Fowler

It is a time of tension.
The WARMONGERS, a terrorist organization led by a cruel dictator known as THE ADONAI have sieged and conquered the sovereign nation of Costa Rica.

The AMERICAN SOCIETY OF SUPERHEROES refuses to intervene, citing their lack of jurisdiction in out-of-state matters. This leaves the polarizing superhero MECHA MAN to make his own stand against the injustice.

But a coup in the ranks of the Warmongers heralds the beginning of a new chapter in this complicated conflict...

FADE IN:

EXT. STEVE KIRBY'S HOUSE - DAY

Steve's house is a rather plain two-story building. The front window is slightly cracked, and the grass is overgrown. Both of its neighboring houses have trimmed grass.

The ADONAI, a tall woman in red-and-black armor adorned in spikes and trailed by a flowing cape, walks up the pathway to the door. Her armor is large, bulky, and angular. There is no suggestion of femininity.

A mother and her daughter walk by on the sidewalk. The mother grabs her daughter's head and forces her to look forward.

The Adonai knocks on the door with a large ARM-MOUNTED CANNON.

The Adonai waits, tapping her foot on the ground.

The door opens, a messy-haired man (STEVE KIRBY) in a bathrobe is standing inside. He obviously just woke up.

ADONAI
Are you Steve Kirby?

Beat.

Steve closes the door quickly.

ADONAI
(cont.)
**Hello? I need to come inside.
I'm not exactly inconspicuous.**

The Adonai looks over her shoulder. She knocks again.

CRASH! Steve bursts through the door, now in the green-and-blue robot suit that makes him MECHA MAN!

He tackles the Adonai, slamming her into the ground and dragging her along the floor, leaving a large trench of upturned grass.

They come to a stop, Mecha Man spreads his large blue wings, and punches the Adonai several times. Her helmet begins to fracture.

ADONAI
(cont.)
**Can you stop? Just for a second,
just... Mecha Man, stop!**

Mecha Man's fist stops mid-punch. He flaps his wings once.

MECHA MAN
Why aren't you fighting back?

ADONAI
**Because I want to talk. I know
how this sounds, but I need a
favor.**

Mecha Man eyes her. His face is obscured by his helmet.

We see the Adonai from his POV, (which is tinted blue and covered in computer read-outs), then the peaceful neighborhood around her. Nothing out of the ordinary.

MECHA MAN
A favor?

ADONAI
**Yes. Now, can you please let me
inside?**

Mecha Man stares her down.

CUT TO:

INT. STEVE KIRBY'S HOUSE - DAY

Mecha Man pops off his large blue wings and places them in front of the door. They form into a doorish barrier that plugs the hole.

He turns around, then double-takes. The Adonai's arm-mounted cannon, as well as several smaller machine guns, have been hung on the coat hanger.

The Adonai is sitting on the sofa, flipping through a *National Geographic* coffee table book.

Mecha Man slowly walks to the other side of the room, grabs a chair, lifts it, walks back, sets it down, and sits.

Mecha Man stares at the Adonai. The Adonai's gaze is fixed squarely downwards at the book.

The Adonai really likes that book.

MECHA MAN

Would you care to tell me why
you're here?

The Adonai closes the book and sets it down.

ADONAI

**I was overthrown by my
second-in-command and cast out.
I only barely survived.**

Mecha Man's whole body lifts a bit at this news. We don't need to see Mecha Man's face to perceive his joy.

MECHA MAN

You were overthrown?

ADONAI

Yes.

MECHA MAN

By Commander Kenny?

ADONAI

No, by Commander Latta. Kenny was the one I toppled the building on top of.

MECHA MAN

Oh, right. My bad. Okay, so the idea of your evil terrorist organization overthrowing you wouldn't surprise me, but why am I supposed to believe you?

ADONAI

Why wouldn't you?

MECHA MAN

You're kidding. I have no reason to trust you. At all.

The Adonai stares at him. She puts her hands on her helmet, and removes it, revealing the short dark hair and hard features of CALYNN STACK.

CALYNN

Mecha Man, in all the years I've known you, all the years we've been at each other's throats, what's the one thing I've never done to you?

MECHA MAN

Ha! "The one thing you've never done?" I won't fall for a sob st-

Mecha Man pauses.

MECHA MAN

(cont.)

Ah.

CALYNN

I've never lied to you. I know we don't exactly have sit-down conversations very often, but that's the truth.

Calynn's glance meets Steve's eyes. She keeps eye contact as she speaks.

CALYNN

When I inherited this title from my mother, I vowed to lead the Warmongers with honesty. Even as the moral sacrifices we've made have become harder and harder to bear, leading with more openness and truth than the Adonai before me was always my priority.

MECHA MAN

(considering)

Alright, let's say, hypothetically, that you are telling the truth. Why would you tell this to me? You're risking a lot to show up on American soil in your full costume, and it seems suicidal to talk to me, of all people. I just don't understand.

Calynn looks at the ground for a few seconds, then back at Steve.

CALYNN

The Warmongers and I have scared off all superheroes who dare oppose me, and killed many of those stupid enough to try. We are so feared that the most powerful governments of the world are afraid to touch us. My name has to be spoken in whispers in polite company, as if I were a demon that could be called by saying my name. Everyone fears me—fears us, except you. You are the one person who has had the conviction to fight me. You're obviously tough, tougher than

most. What's more, your continued battles against my operations have given you an intimate knowledge of the Warmongers that rivals that of most of my own officers.

Calynn pauses and shrinks slightly, as if realizing that she's said too much.

CALYNN

(cont.)

If there's anyone who could take down the Warmongers, it's you.

MECHA MAN

No no, that part was obvious. I mean why do you want to take down your own organization?

A lifetime of murder, compromise, and evil flash in Calynn's eyes.

CALYNN

Everything I've done has been for the Warmongers, and now they've cast me out.

Calynn pauses and looks at the floor.

CALYNN

(cont.)

I want them all dead.

Mecha Man stares at Calynn with equal amounts of awe, disgust, and fear.

FADE OUT:

Rebecca Haller

pt||1

What it took

To get through to me

To you,

The elsewhere.

A vacancy,

And my mother's hands aren't my own;

My bloodshed,

My personification,

My patience,

My moment,

My exhale, a deviating pressure...

My own following a cowardice not betraying,

A friend to keep the jester warm.

I am not my fathers daughter;

I was born in the winds of another mother.

Not earth,

Not a spider,

Not the confines of an apartment i never owned;

A personal,

A vision.

Too many millions.

-Of every measure

Of every forest-

And every daughter,

Away:

And within the heart of it all,

My best was my worst-

The repeating anchor on the ropes

Of conquest,
And i swim
On the anger
Of my own deadweight.
-Until i too soar
My body,
Sore.
-And my chastising ache
An agony
Has left me upfloat,
Where the death of me
Has not been backward,

pt||2

Rather a mirror of a cosmic future,
And I too remember my name.
My face,
My mother,
The sister in my family;
The world i hadn't been left to die in,
Unburied.
-And unspoken in
And my fathers
However heaven lives
Does not harm me-
,And the upside down
In the cascade of my favorite tune,
Does not bore me.
That i,

Too,
Become undone,
In probable light.
A distinct probable.

pt||3

like open arms in an empty space,
and the drain doesnt let the water through anymore;
I am breathless,
moments before drowning,
and my own heart failed to flee me.
“how could you stay here?”
And
“how couldn't you leave?”
and in an awakening eye i saw nothing more,
than martyr bones
in an aching body,
the body I fell flat in.
a tenfold of depth to immerse...

Anjali Kavachery

Naivety

My skin feels as though it's fused to the mattress,
Melting into the sheets and rooting me in place,
Like an unwilling seed sprouting
Into a blooming orchid of sorrow.

The hours tick by,
Visitors come and go,
And day after day
I can't bring myself to look at them.

I am taken over by an overwhelming shame
Of buying into sweet lies
And viewing my future through
Rose colored lenses.

"I told you so"

Yeah, you did.

The pain of that brief romance
Which felt like a lifetime ago

Still cripples me as I pull myself out of bed
And try to maintain a sense of normalcy.

When I Dream...

I toss and turn,
My fortress of pillows brings me comfort
Surrounded by the safety of flattened polyester.
My joints ache with each movement,
Yet stillness is impossible,
Until at last the pain puts me to sleep.

When I close my eyes at last I am alive.
Life as I knew it goes on,
As if nothing ever changed.
The warm light never left my life,
Continuing to fill my world with stability
And unconditional love.

Years seem to pass within a matter of a few hours,
They fly by in a blissful blurr.
I savor every moment,

Not knowing which one will be my last,
Not knowing when I'll get torn away once more
And be forced to live in this crushing reality.

When I open my eyes, I am a ghost.
My every move feels automatic
As I am trapped in an empty routine.
Each second I suffer through,
Is a second closer to a chance at happiness,
Even if it is just a fleeting moment.

We Own the Night

The crisp summer night air,
Seemed to erase the painful memories,
And fill our minds with a hazy euphoria.

The clock was unbelievable,
By the time it passed 1 A.M. we stopped checking,
Opting for focusing on our joyride.

Rules didn't apply to us,

We ruled the store,
Wielding blades of bread and riding steeds of steel.

For a few hours,
Everything felt normal.
It was as if there was no memorial the day before.

All we could do was enjoy the moment.

The uncontrollable laughter,
The signature roughhousing in a Walmart at midnight,
The proud haul of scooby snacks and nutella we acquired in our journey.

In the vast parking lot,
A wasteland of shopping carts and asphalt,
We sit and cheer for a night well spent.

Spoonfuls of nutella signify our joy,
As we use them instead of glasses,
ticks of plastic instead of *clangs* of glass.

Yet, at some point, it had to come to an end.

Laurel Kracht

contagion

The bones snap back into place;
you awaken with a purpose and enough energy to
break through the walls of the room.

Yet-

I feel my mind chase after you,
even as I stand still in the hallway
terrified of what my own hate could do.
Is it love that we call this?
The constant bending back and forth,
the draining pigment in the walls,
how can you come home with nothing to say for yourself?

I am still breaking bones trying to dance with you,
I will pivot on a sprained ankle,
fall and jump into your arms while my ribs push into my own heart,
I will die for you
and you will call it a sacrifice
while I go on believing I am strong.
The memories of us mend me back together
and I hold onto them when you disappear
while I stay stuck on a hospital cot,
bandaged from all the bones I've broken in your name.
I no longer ask myself where you go,
instead, I look at the bare, white walls,
and when the smile begins forming on my lips,
I almost believe it.

But the bones snap into place,
and you come back to me.

time loop: the paradox

I think it's getting bad again,
the stares, those moaning figures in the nighttime,
the painting on the mantle that screams so loud
you can't hear your own voice.
What am I saying?
I think it's getting bad again.

The shuffling of feet wakes something in me,
a memory;
I can't remember how it ended,
or my own name, that face you see me as,
there's nothing here but the empty woods,
a forest full of dying flowers and rotting insects
bones lying limp on the floor,
there's nothing living here but that painting- still shouting.

There goes that vagabond,
I hope she comes home again,
or whatever home was
I can't help but notice the heat in these walls,
the home's burnt down but that sickly *heat* in these walls.
These chains, these vagabonds,
come home, come home,
they never do;
I think it's getting bad again.

So here we go,
down the merry go round
down at dusk and up at sunrise
it repeats and repeats and repeats
I'm tired of the down and up of the merry go round
I'm tired of waking up.
(I think it's getting bad again)
That sharp-eyed and tight mouthed girl from the beginning
does not know my name anymore,
and the woman wearing a mask shouting something behind a painting
has gone silent.
I want to ask her why the vagabonds leave,

if they ever come back, or if the dead stay dead
and the living continue to pretend they're free.

you will go on without my name or face or memory,
I go on just the same.
you will cry, but not with me,
and I will not relieve that pain.

The vagabonds come and go,
but like time- stationary-
I'm still here; I cannot leave.
I missed the route where we were going to meet,
and, thus, the paradox continues.

Ashley Lebron

Rise

It happened, what happens now?

What happens after you realize,

You'll be fine no matter what?

A feeling of faith and hope

That takes you through life.

You'll be reborn

You'll be given wings,

Those of a butterfly ,

The gift of another chance.

A chance you're going to take,

And use it to your disposal.

A chance that will guide you in the direction

And will help you rise above all

‘We try every year’

The same plan every winter,

A plan that never goes through.

A plan that brings sadness to our home.

Not being able to leave for a week

Really hits. My mother tries her best

To fly back to her home.

But this is her home now.
sure, it doesn't have the same palm trees,
With very large leaves, and yes,
It doesn't have sandy beaches or clear blue skies
Almost all the time...

Sure, she had left her family behind,
But she's blessed with one now.
One she created herself,
One that calls this place home.

She is exceptionally grateful,
A feeling of warmth always takes her over
when she sees her little seeds,
Being spread across the land of her home.

She tries every winter,
she attempts to go home,
Not knowing home is where the love grows,
And the love is here.

“It's always easier”

It's always easier to dream, of
All the things you want to come true
Of all the things that make you happy.

Like the long walks on warm, grainy sand,
Long nights with a semi-warm summer breeze
Flowing through the air as you sit,
On top of the world, imagining the world as yours.
The thoughts of riding with your top down, not a care in the world
Ready for whatever comes next

It is always easier to be hopeful.
Hopeful of what the future might bring,
Of the success, you've been flaunting over forever
Of happiness, your family with soon bring to you
The feeling of the love you carry in your heart,
Projects to the others around you, because you believe.
You believe that everyone deserves it.

Everyone deserves the same love,
The same need for happiness.
Everyone deserves to be able to dream and believe,
That everything they believe will somehow be true...
Not for all but as long as it's true for you,
It'll always be easier.

Mercedes Lobb

Meet Rodnique Koonce, Owner of RJ's Closet Boutique, Located in Easton, PA

From a very young age, Rodnique Koonce had always dreamed about opening her very own fashion boutique.

She grew up loving fashion, and she loved to make others look beautiful. So, she took those two passions and opened RJ's Closet in the Palmer Park Mall in 2015. What captures customers' attention when they walk into RJ's is Rodnique's welcoming nature and the boutique's abundance of high-end fashionable clothing. In our interview together, I asked Rodnique what she thought made her boutique unique, to which she responded by discussing the variety of clothing styles that she sells.

"I sell a nice selection of different styles of clothing and accessories at my store," she stated. "Customers can find vintage, urban, casual, preppy, gothic, punk, sexy, exotic, chic, tomboy, arty, glam, and office wear fashion."

Apart from wanting to make her customers look their best, Rodnique expressed that she also aims to help her customers feel their best during our interview. "I want my customers to leave my store feeling confident, happy, beautiful inside and out, and enlightened," she stated. To achieve this goal, Rodnique has made it a point to focus on making all of her clothing items size-inclusive.

Like many other small businesses, RJ's Closet was forced to shut down for the first few months of the pandemic. During our interview, Rodnique expressed that closing down her boutique was financially challenging; however, she says that things have begun to look up since reopening last summer.

"The biggest lesson I have learned throughout this pandemic is to never take anything for granted," she said. "I will utilize what I have learned this past year to improve my online store, just in case there were to be another pandemic or shutdown in the future."

To keep her customers safe during their in-person shopping experience, Rodnique has required that they wear a mask, socially distance, and clean their hands with the sanitizer that she offers them upon entering the boutique.

Although this pandemic has challenged Rodnique in many ways, she has continued to find reasons to be positive during these challenging times. “My plans and goals for the future are to expand my business and open several more locations,” she revealed. “My advice for any woman that is looking to open their own business is to research the business they are hoping to start and create a professional business plan.”

From the moment I met Rodnique last year, I knew that I wanted to interview her. Whenever I go to her boutique, she welcomes me with open arms and is always willing to help me pick out the perfect outfit. Her passion for helping others is something that I have found to be inspiring during this pandemic. I hope that all of you feel that way, too, after reading about her journey to becoming an empowering businesswoman. Rodnique’s story teaches us that through hard work and perseverance, it is possible to achieve the goals that we set for ourselves.

If you are interested in learning more about RJ’s Closet, feel free to check out their website <https://www.rjscloset.com/>. You can also follow the boutique on Instagram @rjscloset_ or Facebook: RJ’s Closet Boutique.

Abigail Morris

Who I Am To You

Every other night, it seemed, there was a desperate attempt to feel something. Tonight, I stared at the ceiling fan until my mind went numb and a nauseous feeling settled in my stomach. The air conditioner wedged between my window frame always neglected to work during the night. It made sweat trickle down my face, leaving my nightgown a darker shade of grey. When I had moved into the apartment in early August, I thought that I would grow accustomed to it, that frustration that I felt during the summer nights would at least become tolerable as time passed. But whenever I would glance towards my clock to see 3:34 displayed in a bold, red font, I knew that couldn't be farther from the truth.

On nights like these, the concept of sleep was far beyond me, so I managed to force myself away from my bed as I felt the sweat trickle down my leg. I found myself moving towards the faint glow that seemed to shine through the cracks in my curtains. Opening those curtains was a revelation in of itself, a gateway into another world far beyond the restrictions of my dark, damp bedroom.

The street lamps attempted to give the road a new life during the early hours of the morning, illuminating the avenue as if the sun had never left us. It was a preparation of some sorts, that artificial light was there to brace us for the day that was slowly creeping upon us. The street was almost entirely dormant despite the street lamp's best efforts, with most of the world choosing the night as its time of rest. Of course, there were exceptions to this rule, like the

couple I saw parading down the street; their hands firmly clasped together as they swung them from side to side. They seemed so out of place, so beyond the constraints of this world. I watched them as they pulled each other closer, their lips locking as a warm summer breeze swept through their dresses.

I could have sworn that one of the girls glanced at me, that our eyes met for a brief moment in time. But I wasn't enough to grab her full attention, that the world right in front of her with her lover was more important than anything I could ever offer. I was too far away, too distant and isolated to ever make an impact on them. I could never understand them.

They left as soon as they came, ready to take on whatever the night was going to throw at them. It wasn't long after that I found myself lying on my bed once again, finding it even harder to close my eyes and let the world go by without me.

Emily Rodriguez

You are someone new,
someone who wishes
to be true
to the singing birds
and skies of blue.

You love the way the world looks
in the summer heat
from the highest branch
beneath your feet.

When the sun sinks
at the end of day,
colors paint the atmosphere
as if to say,

*Have a look at all you are,
and at all the things
you've learned thus far!
And when light returns
upon tomorrow,
the watercolor skies again
will paint away your sorrow.*

Isabelle Schlegel

Homesick Alien

Suburban blues and
Lonely intersections
Rain dancing on the windshield
Makes the world dance too
Tired eyes blink slowly.

Doors open and shut
Night through sleepless night
Day through apprehensive day
Days don't break
They fade away
A bedroom exhausted
By anxious steps.

Monochrome hours meet
Monotonous months
A slow turning
The burn of a fruitless job
Day after faded day
Invisibility creeps through the skin.

Staring out the window
Bodies tire and
Burn out, minds run in circles
Then tire,
And burn out.
Crying dwindles to numbness.
I'm out of here.

Sarah Stoll

Appalachia

Love is a gut wrenching scream in the middle of the night
Love is the silence that keeps the bear away
I feel it when I am a thousand feet high
I feel it in the evening, in comfort,
In whispering
In the pull of lavender, even if only in my head
The morning sounding safety, night falling
Tonight, I'll sleep easy
I'll close my eyes to find
That Heaven is a garden,
Heaven is in the ferns
Heaven is the way we live our lives inside out
In everything he makes, the linen clothes
The cicadas chirping, the quiet that comes after
The damp earth carrying the current, charging

Present Tense

Today, I feel emotional. Today, I took a bath in the pitch dark and only knew I still existed when I held my breath underwater. J says when you get really good at meditating, you can start to connect your feelings to different places inside your body. I thought about rope swinging into the Delaware. The farther you stare down, the more your legs start to shake, your stomach knots itself. Is courage the moment you jump? Where does that sit? Is it the few moments where nothing is in your head, your body and air around it one as you fall? Is that what moves from your gut to your limbs taking flight in the water? Watch it transform into the pride that envelops your body in warmth as you sit passenger seat on the way home. Someone said I should sit with that memory, find where I feel it most. That's your solar plexus yelling, *I am!* The bliss sits in

your heart, you are your heart, your heart is an orchestra and your head is quiet and that is all peace.

I'm in love with the way peace and adrenaline almost feel the same. Almost. Moments where I can't feel the presence of self anymore and my senses are all that there is. Moments where thinking is more harmful than good and all I have to do is follow my body. It's amazing how my body knows how to survive better than my mind does- my thoughts swirl and spin me into states of stagnation. There's no room for this when I am fully immersed in the slight danger of the world around me. I am fully there and at the same time, not at all. I feel alive. Fear starts to transform from an anxiety pulling me to my bed into something bigger, something rational, something present. The world around me becomes crystal clear- I am my eyes and suddenly I've never been so sure of how much I want to live.

But, on the good days, I don't need that.

Ask me about peace and I'll tell you it's when I'm fully present. I'll tell you about firetowers sitting at the top of mountains and steep hills, the woods at night. I'll mention seeing bears on the Appalachian trail and gripping onto fast motorcycles. Black diamonds and Philadelphia at night. The first time I see my brother in months. Swimming in the river, sunrises. A dinner with friends, watching my friend's daughter paint a rainbow. Singing, always singing. Taking a bath in the pitch dark. Water, jumping. The nights where I fall asleep easy. The feeling of a warm sun on my face.

Isabella Tita

TW - Suicidal thoughts, manipulation

Hey You, I'm Gone

I'm gone because you never gave me straight answers.

I've asked the same question for years

And you've said something different each time.

You burned any evidence I may have had that my story is real,

Not for one second thinking that I wouldn't stay young forever.

You're so inconsistent that my mind filled in the blanks for you

In the most gruesome ways.

My whole life rests in your hands because I have no memory,

And I'm watching you crush it in your fist with each lie.

I'm gone for all the times you've blamed me.

I grew up hating myself, and that is on you.

I still remember when, no matter what I said,

You'd accuse me of lying and I'd take the fall.

I could tell you the grass is green,

And you'd scream at me in the most terrifying way

Because, when you were younger, the grass was purple.

You'd make me feel horrible,

Reminding me that you only know because you're older.

That since you're older, you'll die first

And I'll never get the chance to apologize for saying the grass is green.

I still remember how you used to slam your whole body into the door
Because I locked it as I was changing,
Or how you yelled at me when I cried.
You shut me in the dark room with my plate
Because your pork was too dry for me to swallow.

I'm gone because you've always told me that I'm just like my father.
I know you said my therapist told you to, but that's a lie.

I grew up wanting to die
Because if I'm like who you said he was,
Why should I be allowed to walk the earth?
(I know better now. I will live forever just to spite you.
You don't deserve the power I let you have over me.)

I used to idolize him just because he could get under your skin
In ways I've only ever dreamt of.

I used to act just like what you said he was
So maybe
(Just maybe)
You'd leave me alone.

I hate the parts of myself that still have him tied to it.

I am 17 years old, and I can't make noise when I cry.

I'm scared to lock doors,
I'm scared to take food before everyone else has a full plate,

And I can't tell someone when they're making me uncomfortable.
You taught me that it's my fault, not theirs.

I am 17 years old, and I have to close the windows when it gets dark
Due to the fear of what's outside.

Whenever I talk to people, I have to lace each sentence with a lie
Because if I'm not interesting enough they'll leave the room, like you do.
I need to shower twice a day or else I feel disgusting,
And if I look in the mirror on the way out, I cry
Because I've always been told I look like him, but you say I look like you.

I don't want to be either.

I am 17 years old, and I still cry when I think of the day I can finally leave.
The day where I can delete your number and move out of the country.
I don't cry because I'll miss you; I'll get over that.
I cry because of everything you left me with.

I have so much packed in me in the form of anger and fear
In a way that only you can understand
And I'll be leaving behind any chance I have of ever getting closure.
Any chance I have of ever forming a relationship, or trusting someone.

I will be a hermit in a corner store job until the day I die
Because you taught me that I am a genius who is
 “gifted in everything
 but will never amount to anything”

I will never find love, with others or myself.
I will never trust anyone, including myself.

I will never stop thinking, and never know silence or peace.

The only emotions I know are:

1. Fear
2. Anger
3. Sadness

And nothing else.

And I can't even show you this if I wanted to,
Because you'll either just:
Fully reject it,
Come up with excuses,
Or read it and tell me every reason why I'm wrong.

You'd say something like
"How have I failed you this time?"
Or "I'm sorry I'm not good enough for you"
And I'll believe it, because I'm weak.

Once you see that I've submitted,
You won't change a damn thing.

One day, your false sense of reality will crumble
And when that happens, I'll be far away.
Either fix your pride and find me,
Or I'm gone.

Kiara Torres

Prologue - Enter: Royalty

Footsteps echoed in the Abyss, a cold, pitch-black room. The man walked back and forth, running his hands through his hair. He heard trumpets play a couple of notes from outside the door at the top of the abyss and looked up when the door opened. Bright light flooded the room, and Gabriel, an angel with curly golden hair and a silky white robe, peered inside.

“A thousand years have been completed. You are free, Satan.” Gabriel’s voice echoed as he spread his black feathered wings and flew out of the Abyss and down to Hell. Gabriel closed and locked the stone door with a sigh, and flew back up to Heaven.

When Satan opened the huge black doors to his castle, the spirits who were once dancing came to a halt. Their pale spirit forms grew transparent with fright at the sight of their king. They stared at him with wide black eyes, and their king glared back. Satan slowly walked into the grand hall where his subjects were gathered in front of his throne. One of his subjects sat silently on Satan’s throne, staring at their king. Satan grabbed his subject by the neck and in an instant, the spirit disintegrated into yellow ash. The king turned to the rest of his subjects and they all fled the main hall into other parts of the castle. He ordered a servant to clean the chair, then the king took a seat on his rightful throne.

The next day, Satan spread his wings and left his kingdom to fly up to the kingdom above. He scowled at the laughter he heard as he passed by Heaven, and eventually, he landed at the pearly gates of the Kingdom of God. Gabriel sat outside the gate at a white desk and looked through a large book. He looked up when Satan landed in front of him and closed the book.

“It’s nice to see you again. What business do you have today?” Gabriel said with a monotone voice and a friendly smile.

“I need to see Him” Satan responded. The angel nodded, stood up, and grabbed a golden key from his white robe. When the gate opened, Satan stepped inside and looked up to the shining spirit of God on His white throne.

“What brings you here, Satan?” God asked. His voice echoed in the large room.

“In one year, I will be locked away again. I need another to replace me when I am gone.”

“Was your kingdom not fine just the way it was when you were locked away?”

Satan scoffed, “Of course not! The sinners were dancing in the main hall as if they run the place!”

“So, you wish for a child?” God leaned forward in His throne while Satan rolled his eyes.

“An heir to my throne, yes. I cannot create as you can.”

“Fine then” God leaned back in his seat “I will create a son and companion for him to make sure he does no harm. Leave this place, your children will come to you in six day’s time.”

Satan turned around to leave His kingdom and flew back down to Hell. When he arrived at his kingdom, he took a seat on his small black throne and stared at the cracks on the walls surrounding him.

The doors to God’s Kingdom opened for Satan again six days later.

“Where is my heir and his companion?” Satan said as he stepped forward, closer to God’s throne.

“Your children are here, don’t worry,” God ushered them forward “Come now, your true father is here.” A tall humanoid demon and a small round one walked towards Satan. The first one he noticed was much like himself, with black-feathered wings, red hair, and a tail, although his child’s eyes were yellow. Unlike Satan though, this demon had a smooth and pointy horn on top of the left side of his head. The child extended his black wings before his father, a greeting

gesture God taught him and his sibling. He was fairly thin, and as all of God's creations are at first, he was naked.

"Why is he unclothed like this?" Satan shouted, used to the members of his kingdom being fully dressed. Thunder rumbled in the distance as God leaned forward. His fingers snapped, and instantly, the child was clothed in a white sleeveless shirt and black shorts.

Satan then looked at the smaller demon, who was only a bit bigger than their brother's head, and had red skin that matched their brother's hair. The horn on the right side of their head was more jagged than their brothers and greeted to Satan. The demon siblings bright yellow eyes held the color of God's sun. The smaller one landed on top of their brother's head and closed their eyes.

"The taller one is your heir., Axel. And his companion is Teivel. I hope these names are suitable to your liking"

"They're fine," Satan responded, then turned to his children, "Axel, you shall be the heir to the throne and take over when I am gone"

"Understood, sir" Axel replied as he straightened his posture slightly.

"And Teivel, you shall be his companion," Satan said, but God interrupted Satan "And make sure your brother does no physical harm, okay?" Teivel nodded half asleep.

"Good. Now leave, I must have my day of rest." God yawned as he relaxed on his throne. Together, the royal family left and flew down from God's Kingdom. Axel and Teivel heard laughter for the first time as they passed by Heaven. Axel glanced over to his father, then focused ahead on descending to his new home.

“My Lord, may I ask, what will happen if Teivel cannot stop Axel from hurting someone physically? I do not mean to condemn you, I am simply curious” An angel that stood guard beside God’s throne asked warily.

“God responded, “That demon shall not hurt my children, and if he does, he will be punished in the castle, and his companion will watch to make sure nothing like it will happen again.” The room was silent until it was eventually filled with the snores and shifting of God in His throne.



SUKCUR

ENIZAGAM STRA YRARETIL TNEDUTS

TSEFINAM ROINES

REMMUS 1202