

But it is all so tenuous.

Yes? So? Did ya ever think maybe I designed it to be tenuous? Maybe this is not the life you are supposed to be living.

Oh fuck. You blew my mind or whatever.

Yawn. Anyway, did ya ever think that maybe you could totally trust me here, maybe?

What are you saying? Magic exists or something?

CHAPTER 17: I'M TALKING SHIT BEHIND MY FRIENDS' BACKS AND IT'S MAKING ME LOOK REAL GOOD

“Cinnamon. Johnny Cinnamon.”

“That your real name?”

The record scratched and Cinnamon gave Cathexis one of his patented tough guy looks.

Cathexis averted his gaze, reached down and grabbed another muffin. “I only ask because we were just discussing that very spice before you walked in. Cinnamon, right? Like the spice?”

Cinnamon glanced at Hippopotamus, who had a don't-look-at-me-this-is-totally-awkward grimace on her face. He glared back at Cathexis, who was now munching away, looking him in the eye. Johnny Cinnamon melted his tough guy face back into his more default, somewhat bemused not-quite-smile and took his own bite of muffin. “Not bad,” he said. “What is that, ginger?”

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Just an old fashioned love song, one I surely wrote for you and me. You and me. You and me. You and me. You and me. You and me. You and me. You and me...

“I think the record is skipping again.”

“Nah. Fuck that guy.”

“We all make our mistakes.”

“Would you put that down? You’re not *really* expected to transcribe *everything*. Have a little fun, will you? It’s not like this archive is going to last anyway.”

“Okay, gang, once more from the top.”

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“Okay, gang, once more from the top.”

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CHAPTER 18: ONCE AGAIN, FROM THE TOP

“Oh no,” said Johnny’s eyes.

“What is it?” asked Apple.

“My pills. I think I forgot to take them this morning.”

“Oh?”

“I’ll have to go back. Meet up with you later?”

Apple froze a bit with an inappropriate stab of panic.

“At Grace’s? Apple?”

It was now so many time units into the future, relatively speaking, since the last time we checked in with our protagonist, Apple Hippopotamus, and her associate, Johnny Cinnamon, a.k.a. Johnny Pickles, a.k.a. Johnny Dust, who maybe would also turn out to be a protagonist, depending on probably reader feedback or something. It had *been* a while, however, since we had received any *proper* feedback.

“Oh! Fuuck! Ohhhhhh!”

“Somebody’s having a good morning,” said Johnny, grinning awkwardly, nodding over to the alleyway that none of our characters had probably ever been down before. Before today, that is. Apple probably responded with some words as our spotlight shifted around the corner into the blah blah metaphor blah blah blah where Lettuce Bamboo stood, hand over heart, feeling the buh-bump buh-bump of her primary organs. “Thank you,” she whispered into the shadows, before walking out into the clearing. “Excuse me,” she said to the first couple that she

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saw. "Do you know what day it is?"

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saw. "Do you know what day it is?"

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CHAPTER 19: A PAIN IN MY HEART

“Right there. Can you feel it?”

“Sweetie, that’s not your heart. Your heart is on the other side.”

“Whoah there, look who got their degree in probably human anatomy. Oh godsdammit. Those motherfuckers got some nerve.”

Alice turned to see what had all of a sudden clouded Apple’s mood. Oy. Fucking military. “Goddamn fascists,” Alice spat, shaking her head. “They’re a bit out of their depths, yeah?”

Apple was still giving the two interlopers her stinkiest stink eye.

“Maybe they’re deserters,” Alice proffered.

Apple grabbed another ring and swallowed a burp. Her demeanor shifted. She whistled a little tune. “Maaaybe.”

“Geez Apple, what have you got me into?”

“Come on,” said Apple, shoveling the papers into her satchel. “I’ve lost my appetite. Let’s blow this joint.”

Alice looked down to the near spotless plates with the handful of bones that Apple had picked clean. “Okay, sweetie,” she said. “You say so.”

“The fire is still warm. We must have just missed them.”

“Are you sure it was her?”

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Apple reached into the embers and pulled out a still smoldering scrap of paper. "Yeah, this is her handwriting. It's the Historian alright."

"It's a little concerning that you know her handwriting," replied Zorba, taking a sip from his canteen.

"Ha! Caught me. I was just being dramatic." Apple punched Zorba in the arm and grabbed the canteen. "But I *have* seen it. Her handwriting? She used to leave all these notes attached to the documents in the Scholarly Archive. Drove the archivist wild." That was before the flood, obviously. Archives were never known for being the most publicly accessible of institutions, but it had been some time since a human body had set foot or wheelchair inside *that* particular physical space. "I've actually got transcribed copies of a bunch of those notes, but I never tried to, you know, copy her handwriting or whatever. But it's her. You can bet your fancy bag of treasures on *that*." Apple liked to tease Zorba about his fancy bag of treasures that he was carrying around. She still hadn't seen what was inside. It had been four days since they had left the city on this little digression of theirs and

"Groan. Is this going anywhere?"

"What?" asked Apple, wiping her mouth and tossing Zorba the canteen. "You mean, are we heading towards some specific plot of some sort? Ha! Doubtful. But let me check my calendar."

"Wow!" said Zorba. "Look at that sky."

"I'll have a bowl of the fish head stew, thanks," said Zorba, sidling up to the bar. They had reached the little village earlier that night, and the locals were starting to gather around the scattered fires for the evening entertainment. They had run into one of Zorba's cousins on the outskirts of the forest, which was an odd bit of welcomed coincidence, and she had given them directions and a recommendation to try the town's famous fish head stew.

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“Could I get a glass of your local grog, maybe?” said Apple with a friendly, understanding smile to the young lass that was standing amidst the various pots and cauldrons. The lass looked over towards one of the older villagers, who shrugged and went back to tending their grill.

“It’s pretty strong,” said the girl to Apple, biting her lip.

“That’s alright, kid.” said Apple, taking a seat next to Zorba, throwing her bag on the ground, and stretching out. She glanced back at the girl. “Thank you,” she added, sweetly. “I appreciate it.”

The lass ladled out some spirits into a mug and handed it to Apple. She turned to Zorba. “I’ll get you some stew.”

“Starting off strong, eh Apple? Don’t want to fill your belly first?”

Apple shivered after a sip of grog. “Maybe I’ll have some of what he’s cooking later,” she said, wiping at the corner of her mouth, nodding towards the open flames of the grill. “Oh,” she said, “I loooove accordion music.”

The lass brought over a steaming bowl full of greens and chopped tubers and grains and broth and spices and such, along with a smaller, empty bowl. “For the bones,” she said, as Zorba eyed it and then her with questioning eyes. Zorba looked back down to the bowl of stew, which also happened to contain the head of one red fish. He looked back up, grinning large. “Wow, this looks awesome. Thanks,” he said, winking a cheesy-type wink.

The girl kind of stared at Zorba, wiping her hands on her apron. “You folks from the city?” she asked.

“Oh,” teased Apple, “do we look that glamorous to you?”

The girl laughed. “Well, kind of. I mean. Just that you don’t look like the folks that usually pass through.”

“Nah,” said Zorba, “we are totally normal run-of-the-mill statistically not-at-all aberrant human-type normy normal persons of no par-

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ticular interest. Wow,” he said, sucking and sliding a bone out of his mouth, depositing it in the little glass dish. “I think this is the best stew that I’ve ever ate.”

“Here,” said the girl, pulling a dish towel from behind the bar.

Oh. I like her. That makes one two three four connections. I wonder. Hmmm. Well, I never. Now, things. Um. Loss for words. Ok, ok ok. (Fart). Back to our narrative.

Apple Hippopotamus glanced over at that artist from that artist collective that had shared a space in the same unit of the complex that Apple had lived in in, um, New Orleans? What the hell was in this drink?

“Well, if it isn’t Zorba Cathexis.”

“Ah.” Zorba was speaking to some dude. “Cavitron Johnson. Thought I might find you here.”

Wow, thought Alice. This is literally the most transphobic detective movie of all time. What are the odds? Hmmm. This counter top is a little sticky. What language is that? Alice took a sip of beer. Where was she? Was this the past or the present?

The girl was smiling at Apple. “You doing alright?” she asked. “Can I get you another?”

“What sort of book is this?” Apple asked.

“Here, try this pumpkin fritter,” said the chef. “Give her another mug. Her buddy says she’s some sort of hard boiled mystery detective.”

“Thanks, kid,” said Apple after she received her refill. “What’s your name?”

“Um...Mississippi.”

“That’s a nice name.”

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“That’s a nice name.”

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“Thanks. I’m, uh, still trying it out.”

“Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you, Mississippi.”

“Well, you’re the detective. What do *you* think?”

“Well, two things. One, the story has most likely devolved again. Like, we’ve probably completely lost that last scene we were trying to build.” Apple paused. “Maybe we left it at the Dental Clinic, maybe we lost it in our dreams, but this,” she said, gesturing to the notebook, “will not translate to the typewritten page.”

“And second?”

“Um,” said Apple, “What were we talking about? Oh yeah,” she continued, a light bulb popping on above her head, “my current working hypothesis, the one that would make me feel a *little* less shitty about the world, is that these days I am only getting misgendered if I speak out loud. I mean,” she sat up straight, presenting herself with spokes-model hands, “if you’re looking at this and cannot see I’m going for adult human female, I don’t know what to do.” Pause. “I guess it could also be cultural.” Pause. “It’s not like we’re keeping a data set to work off of.”

“Okay, sure. That sucks or whatever, but back to point one. If we’re not going to stick this in the, um, official report, why are we filling so many pages with our pointless drivel. Don’t we have laundry to be washing and/or drying?”

Apple took another bite of s’more as the fires faded from the night before, the bodies of drunken revelers piled up beside them under their throws and afghans and quilts and comforters.

“Aunty Apple?”

“What’s up, Mississippi?”

“Could you maybe teach me how to solve mysteries?”

“Aw sweetie,” said Apple. “I can’t teach you how to be a girl

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detective. That's something you have to learn on your own. But I guess I can just generally teach you everything I know or whatever. If you're interested. But," Apple added, looking around as if she had a secret she didn't want shared with just anybody, "and I probably shouldn't be talking about this with just anybody, but I am currently pretty busy on a quite difficult case at the moment." Apple stopped, and sized up the young lass. "Tell you what I can do. I'll reach out to my old colleague. If you want, she could probably set you up with an internship at the archive she works at. I mean, it's not the most glamorous of archives, but navigating your way through your various research institutions has made up a large part of most of *my* detective work."

Mississippi Hammer, eyes wide, looked to her dad. "Can I, Pop?"

Henry Hammer gave one of his thoughtful, responsible dad expressions and looked at the two visitors before turning his gaze back to his child. "Well, we should probably discuss it with your moms, but."

Cough cough. Sorry. I think this story is slipping away from me here. It's almost as if this is not my story to tell. Anyway, being as though we seem to be thoroughly incapable of doing, you know, actual editing in service of narrative, I can't say what will become of these scenes. Perhaps they'll disappear. Perhaps we'll just trim them back a bit. Sigh. Writing a readable and relevant story can be so difficult sometimes.

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CHAPTER WHAT THE FUCK IS HAPPENING HERE (20)

Well that was weird. What just happened there? One moment we're just deteriorating amidst our filthy rooms, naked in our beds, binging on sad music, missing out on all of our social engagement opportunities, and the next moment we're out and about, doing things, meeting people. What an odd world we live in. What an odd, odd world.

WO40N. No, honey. Yeah, ouch. Um, what would you find appropriate here? Couch couch.

Orange looked over to the bowl of headless fish stew. Was Orange hungry? Was there food inside that bowl? Sorry, said the author. I did say I was going to try and keep myself out of this story. I have an addiction, it seems.

This ia story? Oh. I guess this is a bit convoluted. Perhaps we can speak more simply.

OPEN. Verbatim. Buzz. Something is spinning. Wait. Reading. G.C. Issue 3. Music. Hmmm. I would edit the cover art to kill the commercial, but perhaps you read it differently than I.

"Oh, hi there," said, um, fuck. Um, who is talking? Um. Apple. "How are things?" (said Apple) "I am a fictional character that is talking to you. Are you enjoying this book? I am finding it kind of okay

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mostly? Sometimes. It's hard being a character in a book, though. But I don't need to tell *you* that." Apple paused and sighed. She looked at various things. The shell of an orange, missed connections, the ashes of earlier that night. It was now later that night. A consistent buzz humm noise. Boxes. Something moving through the bushes? Outside? With those we love alive? Apple was crying again. Metaphorically, that is. I guess, maybe, she was in love with the world? Again?

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CHAPTER 30: GIVE OR TAKE A FEW

Well that was weird. How did we get here? All of a sudden, no less. Um, **OJPL Newsletter: PLEASE INSERT DISC AND PRESS PLAY.**

Sadie Rose Rosen sat in what was either her home or the library or the library that was also her home and vice versa, too, perhaps. Maybe. She wasn't quite sure. She had opened up her cookbook to some recipe for some kind of geometric cookie since she recalled that today or tonight or yesterday was according to her mother probably a holiday her family celebrated where they told a bloody story of politics and revenge. This was somehow related to eating tiny hats and you are all invited to the Mānoa Branch of the Orange Juice Public Library during official library hours to have a party, assuming party having is somehow related to the traditions of Sadie's particular traditional milieu and also whether or not Sadie feels like celebrating these traditions tonight or for the next eight days or so (Sadie always got confused about which holidays lasted how many days, so we should probably just settle on 8 for all the big ones). Anyway, come by for all the best in librarianship.

The Next Part

For the next part of our newsletter, we will discuss library politics.

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The OJPL Committee of Um, Resource Allocation or Something will be having their bi-monthly meeting whenever you feel like attending to give your opinions on resource allocation in regards to your favorite imaginary library system.

End of Newsletter.

Love,
The Newsletter Writing Committee

TO UNSUBSCRIBE FROM THIS NEWSLETTER, JUST LET IT SIT IN YOUR SPAM BOX AND NEVER OPEN IT AND CERTAINLY NEVER READ IT AND MAKE SURE YOU DON'T CLICK ON ANY OF THE LINKS

“What the fuck?” said Apple. “I did not agree to take part in advertisements. That was fucked up.”

Sorry.

“Sorry.”

“I guess it’s fine.”

“Well, it looked like you got pretty upset there.”

“No, it’s fine.”

Sorry.

“What do you want to do now?”

“Well,” said Apple, “we can’t never ever ever go back, I suppose. That said, this here seems as good a place as any.”

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Love,
The Newsletter Writing Committee

TO UNSUBSCRIBE FROM THIS NEWSLETTER, JUST LET IT SIT IN YOUR SPAM BOX AND NEVER OPEN IT AND CERTAINLY NEVER READ IT AND MAKE SURE YOU DON'T CLICK ON ANY OF THE LINKS

“What the fuck?” said Apple. “I did not agree to take part in advertisements. That was fucked up.”

Sorry.

“Sorry.”

“I guess it’s fine.”

“Well, it looked like you got pretty upset there.”

“No, it’s fine.”

Sorry.

“What do you want to do now?”

“Well,” said Apple, “we can’t never ever ever go back, I suppose. That said, this here seems as good a place as any.”

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CHAPTER 31: NO MATTER, WE'LL STAY RIGHT WHERE WE'RE AT

Well that was weird. Ahem. Excuse. Story. Um, We were telling a story? Of poetry? No, not poetry? A story, maybe? What's that you say? It's over? Again?

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