

STAYING ALIVE

Oct 2019

Issue #1

AT THE

End

OF
THE

World

Azine about the apocalypse, trauma, suicide,
&
living beyond the end times

Nov. 25 - Dec. 6, 2018

by lor lowell

Bitter Tea Hymnal

STAYING ALIVE
AT THE
END OF THE WORLD
ISSUE #1

Written as I stayed alive from November 25-December 6

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What you hold in your hands is the first 12 days of a 100 days worth of writing.

In November of 2018, I wanted to die. I was living in a fog of panic, the hope and future that I'd barely cobbled together for myself after leaving my abusive family behind, was being slowly snatched away from me. What was the line? "The earth only has 10 years!?"

I couldn't interact online without brushing up against everyone's predictions. Everywhere I turned were the prophets of climate and cultural collapse intoning that the end is nigh. Even business social media accounts marketed to me a dystopian world that was certainly going to arrive any moment now, like a thief in the night. A future? Let's crack funny millennial humor about how we don't even know what that is.

Language like that is hard for me. I grew up steeped in Evangelical end-times rhetoric, and when that stopped having a hold on me, there was suicidality to rear its head. I only know how to see my future as finite to begin with. But at least I knew that I was traumatized, and that that trauma was affecting my judgment and perception.

After 2016, arguing against that trauma felt like it would be akin to arguing against *rationality*. To hope, or even to *trust* in a future; the ignorant, privileged delusion. I was overwhelmed by everyone else's certainty that the only reasonable position to take was the one that said: this is it, there's no way out.

Writing is the only thing I've ever been able to do when it feels like the end of the world. When the future feels impossible, when suicide seems like the only out.

So I took my fear, and despair, and trauma and I sat down in front of my typewriter.

I wrote for 100 days. The number was arbitrary, at my girlfriend's suggestion when I didn't know yet what I was working on or how to give it scope. The structure of habit gave reason to getting up the next morning.

What it turned into was a plea--a plea for hope, a plea to understand how nihilism and despair affects those of us already prone to believing in nihilism and despair.

But it was also my attempt at getting through. The trick of suicidality is one of time; in the moment you think there is no way out. Until you're past that moment. Writing it gave me a

sense of a future, because I understood that the moment I was writing in *required* me to move through it--how else would you be reading this right now?

So what you hold in your hands isn't the original draft. You hold one that's been edited for clarity and intent and for an audience that isn't just me. But also one that's been interacted with; one with new writing as well, as I edited it, as I re-typed it on my typewriter, as I put it together. My way of saying, "Hey, past Tor. You made it. You didn't have to feel any of these feelings. You could have felt safe. And good. And happy." And hope that there is some future me telling me these things right now.

Hey, what day is it? How far away are we from September 12, 2019 (the day of my writing this)? Where ever you are in the future, maybe you can do a favor for me. With all of your power and strength, send a message to all of us in the past that it's okay to let go of our hopelessness. It's okay to believe the future you live in exists.

If you do that, you can trust that there is some future person before you who might read these words and say the same thing. You can trust that their future will also be real.

That's how I stay alive, at least. I hope you'll stay alive with me as well.

Wait, for now.
Distrust everything if you have to.
But trust the hours. Haven't they
carried you everywhere, up to now?

--from the poem "Wait"
by Galway Kinnell

Sunday, November 25

Tomorrow I am going to die.

If this is true, then I am a prophet of my own future, then the assurance in my bones is worthy of consideration; my intuition a measure of proof I can use to ascertain reality.

I am tired of the end of the world. I have been living in the end times since I was old enough to comprehend what the world meant,

and what it looked like to vanish. It was always the end times, the last days, you could always count on your hands the number of years until the return of Jesus. It was as though Jesus himself had said: the end you will always have with you.

There is a space in my head devoted to apocalypse. An end-of-the-world shaped hole I have inside my brain. All it takes is one confident prediction, one assured voice saying all is waste, all is rot, there is no escape, there is no cure. The heart is endlessly sick, the human profoundly stupid, there is no saving us from what will absolutely come to pass.

And then that old, familiar dread fires up in my mind, the light around me becomes dim, and the future, whatever fractured, cobbled together one I can see, vanishes from my eyes. There is only now, and then destruction, only this moment, and then death.

I believed for a long time that God had called me to die. If you didn't specifically grow up Pentecostal, that might not make much sense to you. But in my faith, the ones that died young were often talked about through the understanding that that had been God's purpose and plan for their life. And we found it comforting to frame these stories as though the ones that had this "call" knew; through prophetic dreams, or a deep spiritual knowing, they were aware of how short their future was. And so was I. So was I.

(For context, this faith was a Pentecostal, Evangelical one. Satanic attacks, rebuking demons, waiting for Christian persecution, and the rapture, everything was bright, colorful fear.)

I have said goodbye more times than the human mind can handle. I have written too many farewell letters, both suicide, and the certain belief that in the near future, God was going to take me off this earth.

I have been through so many stages of grief, and then the despair-tinged-relief when I understood that I was wrong, a fool, a false prophet, when I realized that I still had at least a little more life longer than I thought.

I grew up in an abusive family, and I know well the cycle of abuse; that moment when the world shatters around you in fists, or glass, or holes in the walls, or bruises on the skin. And then there is that moment after, the abusers careful remorse, their promises to be better.

The honeymoon period, it's called, though the name makes it sound far happier than it is. It's not a honeymoon. It's a conditional relief, a euphoria of fear, you are relieved in much the same way you were terrified before, and you are always waiting for the happiness to end once again in violence and pain.

That is my brain on the end of the world. This is how I know these things to be true,

how I understand that tomorrow I am going to die, how I know that hope is only a temporary euphoria before the next end-of-the world proclamation that I will believe.

I understand I'm not actually going to die tomorrow. But I also know that anything could happen. There could be an earthquake. An accident. Any sort of death-causing disaster.

These things feel far more likely, far more inevitable.

(And yet, of course, I've already edited this. If you hold it in your hands, I've lived past tomorrow. It was November 25 when I wrote this. It's May 31st as I type this.

What do any of our prophecies mean? Is human intuition anything? What can we know of the end of the world?)

Still alive still alive

If I am still here when this is done, then intuition is meaningless. And this sense that this, right now, is the end of the world, is nothing more than false prophecy.

Still alive Still alive
still alive still alive still alive

September 4, 2019

It's funny how easy it is to only work on this when it feels like the end. To build a record, a narrative, of only the bad days. How reasonable the dread feels, how like logic, truth. How easy it is to lose perspective, to not know our story is punched through with holes, missing parts of ourselves we can't remember we forgot. Maybe this is how the end of the world stays close and too familiar. Our written words deceive our future selves.

still alive still alive still alive

Monday, November 26

I am sick of gleeful proclamations of the end times. The ones that come from those who are more concerned that we all agree that this is the end; that we understand there is no hope and no way out, who see the future as

vanity, who are smugly waiting for their belief to be proven factual, rather than offering any possibility of what we could do to change this future of horror and pain.

It's funny, when I was a Christian, I was often treated like I was a similiar kind of cynic. My distrustful, traumatized self was seen as the pessimist with the grey-colored lenses.

But what I couldn't handle was vapid hope. By that I mean that my Christian faith often coped by way of assuming that as long as God existed, and he could do anything, you could comfort yourself on the belief that he would do the good thing, regardless. My faith was the sort where other people's pain or atrocities didn't register, not when the goodness of God comforted them, regardless of whether it comforted the affected person.

Imagine living through abuse surrounded by people who wanted to imagine happy endings of healing and reconciliation, and then trusting that those narratives were always right, over the people who lived through it.

Imagine being treated like a cynic for acknowledging that sometimes there are no happy endings, sometimes awful things just happen, and whether you believe in God or not, he doesn't always patch things up nice and neat so that White Suburban Christians can feel like everything will always turn out okay.

But on the other side of vapid hope is vapid pessimism. And the Christian faith I grew up in was guilty of that too, for similar reasons. Because God controlled everything, if something couldn't be made nice and good, there was no point in contradicting what was clearly God's will.

It was the kind of faith that saw this world as unable to be fixed by our own hands. We were to sin-soaked, to broken ourselves to do any real, lasting change.

That is the vapid pessimism that I cannot accept. I think it is vapid to assume that humans are infinitely capable of destruction, and too stupid, or sin-sick, or broken, to make any of that better. I think it is easy, and just as cruel, to want people to be brought to the light of hopelessness, just for a consensus on reality.

And what would happen if we agreed to it?

Let's say it, for a moment, let's agree with it okay, it is the end of the world. There is no way out of this inevitable destruction.

The end happens all the time, doesn't it? On smaller scales, within communities, and individual lives. Now everyone, now the whole world

It's the end.

So.

Now what?

Because the end of the world isn't the end. That is the lie of apcalypse. The end of the world would only be an acknowledgment of what is, an assessment before the next step.

Because there is always a next step. There is always a "what now?" No matter how small it might be, or how little of us are left.

This has nothing to do with pessimism or hope. Nothing about possibility or outcome. But there is something to do. Always.

Give me that. If you think it's the end of the world, then give me the next step. I'm not asking for cynicism or false hope. Just work, and a way forward.

Hey, November 26th! We made it to
September 4th!

Tuesday, November 27

You cannot live everyday as if it is your last. I know, I've tried. I understand that the phrase is supposed to get at the unpredictability of life; we shouldn't put off important things to a tomorrow that we cannot guarantee will come/

But to accomplish anything requires conceiving of a future. Why do today what will never be finished, ever, because you presume there is no tomorrow?

I think about the stories we tell of people trapped in the same day, cursed to re-live the same events again and again. How eventually there is the day the character realizes that tomorrow will never come. So what do they do? Anything they want. Nothing matters anymore, there are no consequences, there's nothing more to do when tomorrow never arrives.

For a long time, that's how being suicidal was for me. I couldn't conceive of the idea that my death was even capable of hurting anyone. I couldn't see a future. The world around me ceased to exist. I wasn't real, my relationships to others and the world dissolved around me.

When you live like any day, any second, there will be nothing more, it doesn't always mean you will only focus on what's important. It sometimes means you can only prioritize immediacy; present survival, the things that

can be done quickly before everything ends. Who cares about a future that doesn't exist, that will not exist?

Jesus was supposed to come back when I was nine teen. That was supposed to be the end of the world. I asked my mother at sixteen how long we had left, how far into the future she could see, based on all the "end times" signs she saw around us.

She told me she couldn't see past three more years.

It was 2003. The world was sin-sick, growing worse everyday. That's what my Christian faith saw; everyone was turning away from God, society was getting worse, and Jesus had to be coming back because the future looked to grim for his return to not be soon.

There was no worse that we could get to. And that was how we knew we were in the last days. Everything was bad, and there was no spiritual way it could get worse before it was a foregone conclusion that Jesus was returning.

I never had a five year plan. I never could see a future beyond the day I was living in. I went to college so that I could pretend that I had a plan, playact the idea of a future that I honestly didn't think would ever come. I was going to die. Or Jesus would return. I was just biding my time.

If younger me had believed that I would be alive right now, would I have made different choices? Are there less self-destructive things I would have done, believing that I would still exist, in this body, in this world, today?

We need to conceive of a future, because that's how we plan for it. If today is the last day, we can only treat others and this world with emergency logic, haphazardly gathering up what we can before we run.

There is a future. Our time on earth may be finite, but others' lives will exist long after our own. They will. We have to help plan for the them. We have to understand that they need us to make them a future. Today is not our last day.

And since the future is real, we need to live like it.

September 4th

Giving up sands so reasonable tonight. The future blank and empty. But I know this one I have been here before I know the consequences of the certainty of the end of the world. I know the regret of arriving at a future I never expected to make it to. We have to believe in a future because it's the only way to make it ~~so~~ one we want. I know it will arrive either way.

Wednesday, November 28

What does it profit someone to gain knowledge of the whole world and lose their sanity? Can it even be possible to make the world better by knowing so much it restricts your ability to help?

Sometimes it feels like we link knowledge to morality itself. A belief that the act of being informed is proof of action, or moral character, or empathy.

I am a survivor of abuse. I have complicated feelings about the ways others engage with that. I have been around the people who believe that they deserve the right to never know the details of horrifying things, who think that the true horror is that they might be asked to step outside of their protected understanding of the world and and know things they've only ever interacted with in the abstract. The ones that are angry survivors might make them reassess their beliefs about the goodness in the world, and their trust of other people.

These are the ones who believe that their own moments of distress are the greatest sins of the world, that their own ignorance deserves to be catered to and prioritized.

But I understand there are people who would be destroyed by the details of my life. Their knowledge of what I've been through would only spiral them into despair, only make their sense of the world worse. What would be the point then, on asking them to be "knowledgable"? To what end? Who would it help? Certainly not them. Certainly not others. So why?

If you can't handle the things that I say, if what I'm writing is making things worse for you,

if it's convincing you it is the end of the world, or the end of *your* world, then you don't have to read this. You can set it down, you can walk away, you can determine that I'm full of shit, and you can go write whatever you need to keep going. You can find the things that you are capable of doing, the knowledge that sets your feet to action, and do that instead.

You're not making the world better by simply reading every horrible thing until it destroys you. You do not save the world filling up on others' pain at the cost of yourself.

I lost most of 2015 and half of 2017 to the belief that it was the end of the world. I was certain I was too evil to deserve existence, certain the world would be destroyed at any moment. The only way I knew how to cope with it was to make myself smaller. If I refused to take up space, if I didn't interact with much, wouldn't that use less resources? Wouldn't that protect the world, and others, from myself? Wasn't that a kind of action, a kind of saving?

When I came out of those times, I was struck by what I had lost. What would have happened if I had not believed it was the end, if I had been "irrational" and believed there was a tomorrow? Or what if I had done what felt so cruel of me to do, and let myself feel happy, safe

let myself exist, take up space?

Nothing would have changed around me. The world had continued on like it always continues on.

I hadn't made a necessary sacrifice.

I hadn't helped the world. I'd just lost myself. I could have spent all that time doing just about anything good and enjoyable. And it would have had the same outcome on the world. Maybe better. My self-imposed destruction meant absolutely nothing.

It's moral to be alive

If you're sick on the end of the world, maybe it's time to stop putting it all on your shoulders. If all you have is knowledge and your own destruction, then all you have is more destruction. The end of the world isn't created or prevented by how much of its horrors you consume.

Sometimes all it makes is your own end of the world.

*IT'S MORAL TO WANT TO BE
GLAD YOU'RE ALIVE*

Thursday, November 29

Do you know how you ensure the end of the world? You declare it such. You let everything around you fall into disrepair, you respond to all problems with a shrug of the shoulder, because it's the end, right? And the only thing to be done about the end is to continue to announce

that it's the end. You are now the prophet, predicting the judgment of God. But at least the prophets were calling for repentance. The end of the world calls for nothing at all but despair.

We were so certain that Jesus was going to come back any day now that nothing in this world really mattered. Death wasn't really death, after all; suffering (for Christians, of course) was finite.

The earth was disposable. Because God was going to wipe this place clean, start over in perfection, so we didn't have to worry about it. There was no need to take care of it at all.

And by seeing the world as disposable, we did just that, gave up on it and in return we got our sin-sick wasteland, that fallen world that was only more proof of the fallen world.

How do we counter that? How do we not give in to this future?

We care. We care to the point of foolishness. We care because the only definitive thing, the only thing set in stone, is the act of not caring. We care even if we think caring is futile, even if we think there aren't enough people who care to make one damn bit of difference.

How we talk about ourselves creates the future.

What we can conceive of creates the first steps towards working toward it.

I don't think that's a platitude. It's not about perspective shift for the sake of perspective shift, for a momentary sense of feeling better. It's not about rewriting reality. It's about planning, and actual hope, that concrete, create

It's not about rewriting reality. It's about planning, and hope, actual hope, that concrete, created thing.

Hope is material. It is ~~isn't~~ the reason we get out of bed. It is the getting out of bed. It is a commitment to life itself. 9/5

It can't be the end of the world right now if there's something to do tomorrow. If there is any strategy we can find to extend our life further than the moment we are in. That's how we'll write the future. That's how we'll have something to leave our children. That's how we'll get there; making the path along the way.

Friday, November 30

People declare the end of the world the way I've written suicide notes. Do you know how many suicide notes I've written? Enough to have already asked myself that question

10 years of "suicide notes ago."

Here's the thing: I meant every one of them. But long term desperation meant I stopped having any words to tell people when things were worse, when the thick sick of dread

grew larger by the day and the future shrunk by the minute. I was trying to constantly say, "no, really, *this time* feels like the end," but I had already used up all my extreme words on the last time it felt like the end.

When people say it is the end of the world, all is lost, all is rot, there is no hope, there is no escape, I know what they mean. I know how to

respond to those words. I know how to emotionally situate myself, say my last farewells, prepare for the crash landing. I was going to die, Jesus was going to come back, I was going to kill myself. All these things are contained within this is the end of the world and there is no way out. I know those words.

But I don't know what to believe anymore. We keep using up our end of the world words everyday and yet we keep going, things keep moving forward. Is it not the end? Is this not borrowed time? I don't know what to make of the way apocalypse language is stitched onto every problem. When people talk like this, all I see is death.

And it's not wrong *to* see it that way. Not when the language *is* death.

As strange as it sounds, suicide is often an answer to death. It's an answer to a different kind of death. If you--all of you who declare

everything rot, and sick, and past saving-- all of you who tell us that this is the end, that we should brace ourselves for the crash-landing with no survivors, do you know how much that makes people like me believe we should take our lives into our own hands?

Suicide is often an escape hatch, a way out of what feels unsurvivable. It's a logic that says that if every option you have before you *is* death, then why not exert the last bit of choice

you have over yourself, and make that death your own? What is more mentally ill--the inevitable death you submit yourself to, or the one that you make for yourself?

It's a morbid question sure. But no more morbid than doom and gloom prophecies, than the death that hangs over all of us when we declare that it is the end of the world.

If you want people like me to live, you have to tell us that there is actually a tomorrow we're living to.

How little it takes to change each other. How fragile our narrative of reality is. We can see the rapid-fire difference ⁱⁿ between now and years ago, before social media. But even the idea that we are helpless in this transformation is a narrative we tell ourselves.

We are our own stories, and we pull people in. We are words others give us and we give others.

We transform our past self with every present idea in our head and that becomes the future.

It takes so little to give each other a future we can see.

Saturday, December 1st.

The first thing that must be bluntly stated: suicide is often not irrational.

If we, as a whole, assessed that there was never any means by which we could end a life; if we believed that we were obligated to keep people alive for as long as we technologically could, no matter their suffering, or quality of life, even if it meant life support forever and ever,

amen, then suicide would be completely logically and morally wrong. But even in the Christian faith that I grew up in, a faith that believed that only God himself had the right to decide when it was your time to go, still had its caveats for removing those technological means and "leaving it up to God."

My family took my father off life support. They determined that the artificial means of keeping him alive wasn't the moral option. God does not prick their conscience, no one argues that they are responsible for taking a life.

We do not consider keeping a life alive to be the most morally correct thing to do, in all cases, across all time. If we did, then taking someone off life support would never be acceptable, then the idea of letting God or nature dictate someone's end would be immoral as well.

And see, suicide, as I wrote yesterday, is often about beating death. It's a rationale to unchanging pain, or an unforeseeable future, or to the certainty of your own evil, or to experiences that feel like they might destroy the human mind to attempt to live through them.

Whatever it is, the person who kills themselves feels at the end of the world--the end of *their* world. The feelings themselves may be irrational, but suicide as an answer to that crash landing, is not. From that framework, it feels like the more humane way to treat yourself. A less cruel option than everything else before you.

How do we keep someone alive? How do we give any of us a real, sustainable reason to live?

We give them that concrete, created hope.

We give them plans, we give them days with meaning, a present that matters, and a future that does, too. We give them so much, so that

when the thick sick of suicide whispers in their head, there's always something to hold onto. Always something to do, always somewhere to get to, real reasons to keep going, because there's something to keep going to.

What happens though, if we believe, with conviction, that the end of the world is at hand? If we consistently assert with a confident, maybe sometimes even cynical, flippant, it's-obviously-reality tone, that all is rot, all is waste, there is no future left for us, the human condition too sick, too destructive, to survive?

Then we concede to suicidality. We prove ourselves hypocritical, our "don't kill yourself" rhetoric untenable, an admittance that they are nothing more than platitudes that belie the reality we believe in; we cannot both tell the suicidal person that life is worth living, while telling them that the idea there is any future or hope is actually a joke, an absurdity, an illogical position to hold.

If we think that it is wrong for someone to kill themselves, if we think it is tragic, if we think that things are made worse, not better, then we have to offer positive assertions. Not "don't kill yourself," but, "here are the reasons living matters. Here is the future we are going to create with you. Here is how we are going to make tomorrow breathable. Here is the future worth getting to.

APOCALYPTIC THINKING KILLS

(Because how can the suicidal person be wrong about whether life is worth living, if we're also consistently telling them that there is no more life *to* live?)

9/16

I think about suicide contagion. I think about not just why we want to die, but also the logical reasoning of why we think it's good, and right, and reasonable to kill ourselves. "I don't matter," suicidality says. "I have no point. If I were dead, it would make things better." How much do others' predictions of the end of the world justify that? Do you know how much the doom and gloom prophets tell suicidality (that its reasoning) is sound? We hear everyday that there is no hope. Of course we believe it.

December 1st (later, same day)

There is no way out, is there? That is why I am writing twice today. Because I'm convinced that every use of the world apocalypse is accurate, real, and rational.

When I was a Christian, I was taught that all of the world's ills could be traced to original sin. We humans were profoundly sick, unable to save ourselves. Without external pressure, with-outthreat and reward, and a moral agent watching us, our default state was to be cruel, selfish, petty, and self-centered.

But outside of that faith, original sin still lurks within our language, still forms our "common sense" understanding. Not God, though, but "human nature", that thing we treat as biologically binding. And it is this "human

nature" that fuels the secular apocalypse. It says: we are all profoundly ignorant, lacking in both logic and moral center, a mass of unintelligent, instinct-driven creatures whose future will only ever end in destruction. The ones that care, the bright-eyed, foward-thinking ones, too rare, too few, and yet they are our only hope. And that's why there isn't any.

I have a secret for you: I am of average intelligence. (Maybe you won't think that's much of a secret) I am one of those 50 percent kinds of people, on the low end of the middle, one of those unimpressive sorts often considered too ill-fitted for redemption.

I am learning disabled. The draft of this zine

I am learning disabled. I had to retype this because I wrote "learning disabled" and almost left it in as a jokw.

(now you know why I have cuts mid-sentence)

I am learning disabled. (I had to re-type that sens

I am learning disabled. (I had to re-type that sentence because I wrote "disabled") The spell0

I am learning disabled. (I had to retype that sentence because I wrote "disabled.") The spelling errors and strange syntax that you *don't* see would make those so brilliant, rational few weep. I am mentally ill, a survivor of a buse who has written suicide note after suicide note throughout the course of their life.

Does that make me one of those people whose life is a waste? Am I part of the perpetuation of the end of the world?

The collection of cynics who believe the world would be better if humanity would just curb its members, would cull itself of the "undesirables;" have you noticed they never count themselves among those numbers? It's like in my former faith--there is no sin that is the unpardonable sin for yourself. You are always undeniably saved, whoever you are, whatever your collection of beliefs you have. There is no one who believes in a god in which they are damned.

And no one who imagines the dead weight of humanity ever includes themselves. It's as though they think, by virtue of believing this is true, they are one of the few who the scales have fallen from their eyes, and they no longer count among the mindless automatons they see in the rest of the world.

Except for me, when people say this, when they speak with assurance, with such certainty, that we could save the world if all those with the original sin of being stupid would just die already, leaving the brilliant behind to finally make progress, I feel that weight of responsibility. I do, after all, want to save the world. I don't want the apocalypse. And if we are nearing the end, and if this is a viable way to ensure that it doesn't happen, the then don't I have a moral responsibility to die?

To those who spout that kind of reasoning: do you not think that those mindless, dull-witted people can read? Do you not grasp the sapience

of those around you? Can you not comprehend the broader impact of the things that you say? Are you truly so ignorant, your understanding so limited in scope, your logic so ill-thought out that you cannot for a moment understand that others have an interior world just as complex as your own? Are you really the progressive thought, if you don't know that everyone around you is just as vibrantly alive as you are?

And if your thinking is off, if you are in fact absolutely wrong about what human nature is, because you cannot extend the understanding you have of yourself onto others, can any of your beliefs about what would save the world be true?

Do you think you are sin-sick, are rot, are only capable of destruction? Do you think you are insinct driven, nothing more than unthinking biology that can never do any good? I doubt it.

I think that I'm more than that. I think that I have an interiority that others would be remiss to presume doesn't exist. And I bet you, whoever is reading this, thinks the same about yourself.

This is not human nature. This is not our biological trajectory, and maybe that's the fear.

Maybe it's easier to resign ourselves to the end, believing that if only all these other people weren't around, we could have had a different outcome. Maybe this is harder, to say that we are not destined for this. To say that we ourselves have to figure out how to save each other.

Sunday, December 2

Do I even have a *right* to declare the end of the world inevitable? Am I allowed to wash my hands of everyone else's future?

Do I have a right to look at oppression I do not face, ones that I may even benefit from and say, "Sorry, this is inevitable. This is human nature; these are the bad people who can only do bad and only ever will do bad."

Is that acceptable, to believe that I'm morally allowed to accept the suffering of others as unchangable?

I've never been able to handle that, as a survivor. How easily others accept abuse as perpetuated by monsters that exist outside of all societal influence. As though it's an unstoppable force, a supernatural-like power we have no influence to change.

I don't accept that I am allowed to give into despair over things I am not at risk to suffer from, where my fear and cynicism are easy because I'm not the one fighting for my life.

So how can we declare the end of the world when there are other people we are giving up on? How can we say all is futile, all is lost, all is sin-sick and rot, humanity cannot climb above cruelty and destruction, when *we*, ourselves could do something?

trying trying trying trying trying trying

I swear I am trying trying trying trying

trying try ***** trying trying

I swear I am trying to live trying

Is suicide not socially preventable? Is it devoid of any outside influence? Or is the suicidal person listening, watching, thinking, hunting for solutions long before they make their final choice?

How can we help them? How can we help them?

Do we know what the suicidal person is thinking, when they hear us talk?

It's why "suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem" has always felt like such a crass platitude to me. Because we offer it to people without asking: what *is* your

a way out a way out trying trying

temporary problem? How can we make it better? How do we fix the temporary right now, so that it *doesn't* become the permanent?

Is the temporary problem that they can't pay their bills? They're going hungry? They're in an abusive situation with no option to leave? They're depressed and feel trapped by it?

trying trying trying trying I am trying to find a way out trying trying trying

but I don't know how know how know how

trying to live trying a way out trying

trying trying trying trying help

We will not have a good answer to suicidality until we are able to acknowledge that it does-

n't exist solely in a pocket world of the mentally ill's own making. That we have real influence, and how we talk to each other, about each other, how we help each other, affects our hope, our mental health, our ability to create and see a future.

Do you know what it's like to be told that if someone had been through what you had been through, they would have died of the shame?

How easily we treat shame like it's inherent to sexual abuse. How easily we reinforce the very ideas we say are only natural.

Do you suppose, had I been able to tell someone I was being abused, if it had been handled with proper support and I had been removed from that environment, do you suppose my trauma might be less?

Do you imagine that, if I had not been trained from a young age to believe the world was ending, I might not see any of this with the same eyes? Do you imagine that the support we offer others, the help we give them, the stories we tell about their own future, might influence how they see the worth of their own life?

I took an indigenous literature course in college but before the professor had us read anything, he first had us interrogate our own understanding of what stories are. Why do we tell them, how much do they actually indicate our societal values, how faulty would it be for outside perspectives to make sweeping judgments about us based only on the stories we tell?

He argued that we can only tell stories of futures we can imagine. We have to be able to first conceive of the possibility of that future before we can ever tell it. Stories change when our sense of what's realizable changes.

It's a fancier way of saying representation matters. We write the stories of the futures we conceive of, we conceive of the future from the stories that we tell.

I know there are stories that exist now that could not exist 10, 15, 20 years ago. I know we've invented futures that we never could have pictured. I know for me, I didn't have this story of myself 10 years ago; the one where I could escape from my family.

And the end of the world, too. We can make that the only future people see, offer that as the only possibility, the only outcome, until that's the only story we know how to tell, and the only story we know how to believe in.

What's our social role then, in how we talk about the end of the world? Do we have a moral right to give up on other people's future, to tell them that no one will come for them, no one will fight for them, no one will do anything to help? Do we have a right to say that to the ones who are fighting? Do we have a right to proclaim the end times when that means ~~we're~~ also telling others their future is finite?

And aren't we then just talking about ourselves? Aren't we revealing that it's our apathy and disinterest that's resigning us all to the end? Aren't we telling them, "don't die," on the one hand, and on the other offering nothing to ensure they can live?

What happens if we start writing a better story of the future? What if we conceive of one in which we live? What if we told those who don't know how to make it through another day that we know how to make a future that they can exist in?

If a good future sounds too good to be true, maybe it is. Maybe that's the point. Tell others the future is too good to be true. And then let's obligate ourselves to it. Let our stories be promises we make to others.

Monday, December 3

If I wanted to, at any moment, I could go on-line and fill my head with every last news article about every tragedy, injustice, and

disaster. I could fill up on sensible, reasonable-sounding rhetoric that makes it clear to the apocolypse-shaped hole in my head that yes, this is the end, there is no way out. We're all goners, every last one of us. And how would I know they weren't telling the truth? How could I argue against this thing I fear is real?

I feel better today. I think about next week existing. I can conceive of a year from now, a year, a whole shiny year, the longest my brain ever assumes is possible for me.

(It's funny how editing reveals the forward-and-back nature of mental illness. How reality is shaped around us by whatever state of consciousness we are in. I can't remember December 3rd, or if there was a reason I felt better. Today (May 20th) I woke up and all I could see was a blank future in front of me, an unbearable one full of nothingness and pain

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and missed chances.

(And now too, as I type this up on the typewriter again. It's July 16. Seven months have passed, and I am trying to hold on as my brain careens me from hopeful to certainty that it's the end.)

9/10

I had nightmares last night. The CSA survivor experience. My sense of the world feels mapped wrong. There always feels lately like there's something in my head I can't get out. The same horrible truth I'm repressing but I don't know what it is. Lately that's my end of the world. Feeling like I'm running from something I can't confront because I don't know what it is at all. Friend or foe, monster to fight or leave behind, past demon or present problem, I don't know.

Always that honeymoon part of the cycle of abuse, but with my brain. When was the last time I felt good? Not ~~just~~ just pockets of days when it wasn't the end of the world. But good. Safe. When does the end of the world stop?

And yet, on the internet, there exists everything necessary to destroy my sense of the future. On the internet, I could crush this good feeling, and believe, once again, in only the end. What do I trust? Which is the delusion? What sense counts as mental illness?

Online we often refuse to acknowledge that how we speak carries any weight. We see mental illness as this thing that exists solely in the mind, something that went wrong in the parts of our brain responsible for logical, rational responses. That those with "unsick" minds know how to see the world correctly.

As though there is no connection between what we say and how other people are affected by it.

As a child, my mother liked to fill my head with every potentiality for disaster. Every wind storm we had, she would explain to me how the neighbor's palm tree, that loomed thin and tall above their house, could crash into ours if a gnat was strong enough; crushing our porch and wiping out a chunk of our house. I didn't know as a kid that the likelihood of that was insignificant, that every time the Santa Ana winds blew in, sending trashcans careening down the block and causing our mobile home a fit of creaks and moans, that we were actually safe.

We went to a demolition derby at the local racetrack; drivers bashing their cars into one another until the last one moving was the winner. There was a station wagon in the mix, one that looked nearly identical to ours, and my mother told me, deadpan, that it *was* ours, to the delight of the horror on my face.

But it was not "mental illness" that made me so anxious here. You can't look at that and wonder about the strangeness of an illogical mind who dared to be so afraid that their house might be destroyed. You can't presume there's something delusional about a child believing their own mother and panicking at thinking their family's car was being smashed into oblivion.

This is how it feels to me when people casually say that all is lost, all is rot, there is no way out, the sin-sick world cannot be recovered, and then assume that there is something wrong with the logic, and the sanity, of the person who takes that rhetoric seriously.

The mentally ill person is in a double bind. To panic, to lose themselves to depression, and suicidal thinking, to presume there is no hope, is to think and feel in a way we would call mentally ill. So health, and logic are then tied to listening to so many of those around us declare the end of the world between laughter and fun, between full lives that operate as though it's *not* the end of the world. And we're supposed to believe that *that's* logical.

Are you mad if you say there is nothing we can do to fix anything, that the world is too evil and sick, humanity too corrupt to save itself, and there is no way out? Or am I mad, for not knowing I wasn't supposed to believe it and respond accordingly?

If I step away, I'm calmer. If I never touched the internet again, I would probably feel healthier, sturdier, more stable.

It sounds like ignorance, doesn't it? Like putting myself in a bubble. It feels morally wrong, like I'm washing my hands of the pain of others, like I'm giving up on caring and truth.

And yet. If all you say is that it's the end of the world, and you're still here, still conceiving for a future for yourself, then who is the one who's mentally ill? And who is responsible for the ones being driven crazy?

It is easy for nihilism to accept the present as the only thing that could be real. The only way things could be. The world stretches behind us

and we cannot imagine anything else that could be

because we are here now, and now is the only sense-making. It's easy to believe in dest-

iny, as though everyone before us could have made no different choices, as if every decision they made was the only thing they could have known to do. That's what "product of their time" means, doesn't it? That our entire historical past happened at the hands of people who, given their knowledge and circumstances, could have made no other choice. As though once the present becomes the past, it ceased ever having free will.

I grew up with a parent that kicked her abusive husband out of the house. She got her freedom, she learned to see abuse for what it was, learned to understand that she didn't deserve it.

And then she turned around and treated me cruelly, like I was worthless, like I deserved what happened to me, like I was wrong and cruel myself for not forgiving and pretending that the things my brother had done to me had never happened.

Did she not know better? When she accepted humanity for herself, but not for me, was that because she somehow *couldn't*? Or did she have a choice?

To imagine the past was out of the past's hands, that everything around us is created by previous destiny, I think comforts a lot of people because it stops the most horrible, maddening question of them all: what if things had been different?

It's September 11th today, so I think that requires similar reflection. Did any of this have to happen? What ~~could~~ choices could those in the past have made? What ways would those different choices have given us a different present?

I understand it's a question I can't dwell on too long as a survivor of abuse, or I'll risk getting stuck forever, lost in every single decision my family could have made differently, and left me with less trauma to work through.

But I think it's something worth considering on a broader scope. What if people had made better choices? What if western society had not destroyed whole people, and nations, and lands? What if America's past had *not* been a bloodbath of violence and torture and the obliteration of others?

We have to undo the idea that we could never live in a different time than the one we do now. There is no spiritual or scientific reason to it all, save for the choices that were made.

We need to understand this so we can understand that we're not presently fighting a battle with people who are unthinking monsters, incapable of doing anything but enacting violence.

Grieve. Rage. Hate every cruel, unjust thing happening around us, because it's all too much, and then hate it doubly so because none of this was *inevitable.*

And then let's cease making it seem like it is. Let's fight, because we have reasons to fight and because we *can* fight. Because we have choices, too. We can be something different ourselves. We don't have to give in to the idea that all is rot, all is sin-sick, there is no saving us. We can make something different.

I want to tie all of this together.
Secular apocalypse, doom-
and-gloom prophecies, the
privilege of giving into
despair over harm you do
not face. I think it means
something that I see this
kind of despair from fellow
white people. I think it's
telling that it's white
Evangelicalism that teaches
the rapture, and the sick
humans that cannot save
themselves. 9/11

Abusers need you to
believe they can't help
themselves. Nihilism,
prophecy needs
inevitability. Needs
us to see ourselves as
pawns that can't
change anything.
It's a lie. I know
it's a lie. We can
help it.

Wednesday, December 5

I no longer think it's useful to get stuck on whether or not I'm a good person. I grew up

in a Christian faith so concerned with sinning vs. righteousness, so focused on the self's morality that it was more important that we *saw* ourselves as making moral decisions then concerned the effect those

decisions had. If 10 people would suffer from your inaction, and one from your action, better to let 10 people suffer and be blameless, then have the responsibility on your hands from the one.

or put another way: if helping someone would cause you to sin, then let them suffer, let them be destroyed, let them die, so that you're blameless.

My faith created a moral landscape that said: treat others well because God commands it, and you should obey God for the benefit of yourself. You'll be happier, and healthier, and will be rewarded for treating others well.

How I feel about myself and how I'm seen have no bearing on this moment and my responsibility in it.

It's easier to have empathy and care and to do good once you let go of the moral obsession of whether you are a good person.

(During my mental health breakdowns, I believed I was evil. I believed that my existence was inherently harmful to others, and I tried to destroy myself. Cut myself off from everyone, mute my own opinions in case everything I said was hurtful. When I came out of that, I realized that none of it had meant anything. I'd wasted all this time trying to protect others from a self I had never given them. I'd tried appeasing my guilty conscience in a self-punishment that gave nothing good to anyone.)

It's so easy to build a moral framework around being a good person. Or a bad person. To see morality as a form of identity that cannot be questioned without extreme distress. And

then relieving that stress the main focus.

Maybe I'm evil. I've spent more of my life believing that than not believing it. You don't grow up a survivor of sexual abuse in an Evangelical Christian community and not come away feeling constantly evil.

Maybe it is the end of the world. Maybe my own sin-sick, destructive self helped fuel it. In which case, to lose myself to guilt would be worse. Self-destruction is nobody's justice.

It will not fix my own evil to do good, but that doesn't matter. I still have the power to make better choices. I still should. That's how we keep moving forward.

I can't reassure you, the reader of this zine, that you are good. I don't know anything about you. You may have nothing in common with the reader I imagine when writing this.

Your life and history are not mine to know. But if you're worried you're evil, hi. Me too. Let's just make better choices. Make them even if they never make you a good person.

Make them even if they never can undo all the pain.

(This one has been hard to revisit. The anxiety is ever present as I work toward getting this zine out there. I see all the flaws, all the things that are missing that I don't know how to write better. But I've already tried destroying myself, my thoughts,

my me-ness. And it isn't good. It isn't a moral framework. It's not a reasoning to live by.)

This was written when I was ^{9/11} 50 certain I was evil, I had to construct a morality in which I could still live. I don't know if I'll ever stop seeing myself as cruel the way my mother said I was. I lose so much time to the terror. So much of this year too was lost, lost, lost. I don't know how to be at peace and not believe that peace is wrong.

escape escape escape escape escape

Thursday, December 6

Sometimes I imagine leaving. I imagine hopping on a bus or a train and taking that as far as I can, transferring to the next bus, or train, going, going, going, until I am small, meaningless, a speck in the entire world, a recluse that cannot be touched or touch others, unheard of, unknown.

escape escape escape escape

It feels safer, more feasible than suicide. It's a way out that hurts more myself than anyone else, that does not subject anyone to the pain or hardship of my death, and it feels small scale to the broad and fast consequences of the end of the world.

escape escape escape

I have not cried much in my life. I cannot cry when I am certain it is the end of the world, the tears feel worse then. Tears would offer some small bit of relief, and that relief would be harder, because it would feel false: a cruel relief to something so final and

escape escape

unavoidable as whatever makes it seem like the end, like there's no way out. Tears still have fight in them. Tears say you can mourn and move forward. Tears are not giving up.

escape

But I was a child in a family in which there was no way out. As far as I knew then, the pain of my childhood would last forever. Families just **are** this; violence and screaming, and sexual abuse, and the face of those in power over you, reminding you you are small and you will never, ever win.

I ran away from home in my mid-twenties. It's weird, it always feels weird, to talk about running away when you are so solidly an adult, when technically, no one was trapping you or holding you hostage. But I was trapped, I was trapped by my mother who taught me to see myself as trapped, who trained me from a young age to be nothing but obedient, to see the world only from her eyes, where

contradicting her would have been contradicting reality itself. To leave her would be cruel, and ruin everything. To leave her felt like the end of the world.

If I had looked at her directly in the eye and told her I was leaving, she would have had me forever. She knew how to guilt and beg, ask me for sympathy and demand to know how I could be so cruel. And I would have stayed.

I would not have been able to resist the ways she'd trained me to obey her.

Stay Alive Stay Alive Stay

So I left, one dark, early morning, sneaking out the back door to meet a friend. ive

Stay Alive Stay Alive Stay
A live. Stay Alive Stay Alive

I didn't cry then. I lay on my bed in the room I'd been able to rent, staring up at the ceiling fan in a dead panic.

Stay Alive Stay Alive

I'd given myself a year. That's how I was able to move out, the only thing that gave me strength. I had been going to die, if I kept living with my mother. So why not run away on the gamble, the premise that I had nothing else to lose. Try it for a year. And if I couldn't do it, I had a plan, a failsafe, a way out if it really was the end of my world.

Stay Alive Stay Alive

I could just die, if the chance I gave myself didn't work out.

Maybe, if things get to rough, if, on a day like this, where I feel like the bright winter sun is too sick to look at, when there are a thousand accusations in my head and I can't fight them, when I am going to die and the world is going to come to an end,

hey there - we made it past 9/11/19. Congrats. I'm proud of you.

maybe one day I'll listen to that call to escape again, and I'll pack up and go take a bus to the end of its line, and then pick up the next bus to the end of its line, and go, and go, and go, until I am small, and far away.

Until then, I will wait and see, like I waited to see in 2012 if I could make it to 2013.

Because you never know when it's *not* going to be the end of the world.

Wait, Galway Kinnell wrote.
Distrust everything, he said,
but trust the hours.

Trust the hours, and they'll bring us
to tomorrow.

Thanks for reading!
I write about:

abuse, child sexual abuse,
complicit & toxic Christianity
harm in the name of
silence & community
the anti-apocalypse
the rejection of the end times

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