

Every
thing

BUT

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let's get Fünke

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REMINDER:

Water plantel

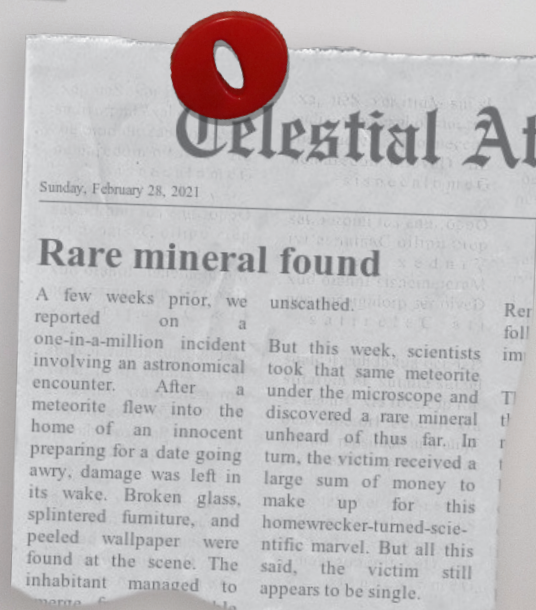
ZINE // FEB 2021

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Cover by Marriya Schwarz
Back Cover by Brooke Rees



I am a sucker for a good will-they-won't-they. And I mean a *huge* sucker—always have been, always will be. I can't get enough of it, really. I get so worked up! But of course, there's a right way to do it, and there's a very, *very* wrong way. Without further ado, here are my ratings of some of television's best and worst will-they-won't-theys.

Spoilers Ahead

By Setareh Sanaei

Ramblings of a Full-Time Shipper:

Rating the Best and Worst Will They Won't Theys of Television

Nick and Jess (New Girl)

Call me basic, but Nick and Jess is my absolute favorite TV couple, and I will not apologize for it. First of all, the sexual tension they have is **chef's kiss** (see "Quick Hardening Caulk"). Flutters. Secondly, their friendship is the reason they are such a good couple. The way they're always there for each other even when they're not dating shows how deeply they care for one another and sets a strong foundation for a relationship (see "Chicago"). I have never seen a couple *like* each other so much. Thirdly, they probably had the best reason for breaking up out of any of these couples, and I respect it. Lastly, when Jess says "And before you say no, don't say no" ("Elaine's Big Day")—well, I cry every damn time, including right now when I looked it up to make sure I quoted it correctly. 10/10.

Ross and Rachel (Friends)

Ross and Rachel are one of TV's most argued about couples. Now, *of course* I spent the whole show waiting for them to be together

“ [Ross] making [Rachel] choose him over the career opportunity of a lifetime was so lame. ”

(especially when I was a kid), and *of course* I thought they were cute, and I cried when they kissed in the Central Perk doorway and cried again when they kissed after the prom video and cried *again* when she got off the plane. *HOWEVER*, if you sit there and think about

their relationship for more than two seconds, you realize how truly horrible it was. First of all, it's widely agreed upon that Ross was the worst character on *Friends*, and that obviously extends to his relationships. He was possessive, jealous, judgemental ("*Just* a waitress??"), uncaring (Remember when he fell asleep reading her letter? Or when he lied about getting their marriage annulled? Need I go on?). Now, putting aside the fact that Ross was the worst, they were only actually *together* for about 10% of the show (Trust me, I did the math. And if I did it incorrectly, please don't tell me). You're telling me I spent 10 seasons obsessed with a couple whose relationship lasted like five total minutes? Finally, waiting until the last episode to write them back together and him making her choose him over the career opportunity of a lifetime was so lame. 4/10.





Barney and Robin
(*How I Met Your Mother*)

Okay, so imagine you create a show about a boring, annoying guy on the search for the love of his life, and in the pilot, he meets this girl, and you decide from the beginning that he will end up with this girl. *Then*, imagine being so out of touch that you write Robin and Barney to be the most *perfect-for-each-other* couple to ever exist, spend six seasons developing their characters and their love story, make the ENTIRE last season about their wedding, and then in the last TEN minutes of the show, have them break up and somehow put her with Ted. Like, I *get* that they decided they would end up together from the start, but *why* would you throw away seven seasons of plot, character, and relationship development when you could easily just have said, “I know, this was the plan, but the story took a different turn and so we should change the plan”? I

will never not be mad about this one. -10/10.

Now for some rapidfire:

Jake and Amy
(*Brooklyn Nine-Nine*)

This show was one of the only times that a couple had a brief and exciting will-they-won’t-they run, but once they were together, they stayed together. And. It. Was. Refreshing. Really, we don’t always need to spend years and years pining for a couple to be together; we will still watch if they just have a good, happy relationship. 10/10.

Jackie and Hyde
(*That ‘70s Show*)

Similar to *How I Met Your Mother*, the writers of this one really said “okay let’s make this amazing, cute, loving couple, give them the best character development on the entire show, and then have them break up

for literally no good reason, and have them both end up miserable.” 3/10.

George Michael and Maeby
(*Arrested Development*)

I don’t mean this literally, because *Arrested Development* is my favorite show of all time and this whole situation was hilarious, but this “will-they-won’t-they” should never have happened. If you haven’t seen the show, they’re cousins, ‘nuff said. But just kidding: the George Michael-Maeby plotline was one of the funniest things to ever happen on TV. -5/10.

Midge and Lenny
(*The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*)

I’m still waiting for this one to actually happen, but my god. The tension, the banter, the wit, the friendship. And of course, Season 3 Episode 5. 8/10.

Fleabag and the Priest
(*Fleabag*)

Now, I don’t want it to seem like I just *throw around* my 10/10s, but when it’s deserved, it’s deserved. Again, the sexual tension, the banter, the deep conversations, the friendship, the way he’s the only one who can see her talk to us. Basically, the *writing*. This is probably the only time I wasn’t angry that a will-they-won’t-they didn’t end up together. All I have to say is thank you, Ms. Waller-Bridge. Truly phenomenal. 10/10.

Schmidt and Cece
(*New Girl*)

This one is an 8/10 only because I can never *fully* get over Schmidt cheating, but the character development was there and I

think by the end, he did earn forgiveness and deserved her. Beautiful couple, amazing progression. Well done, *New Girl*, you made the list twice. Honestly, Winston and Aly were also a cute will-they-won’t-they. Three in one show, wow. 8/10.

Max and Kyle
(*Living Single*)

I have never seen a character have *less* development than Maxine Shaw, Attorney at Law. Kyle deserved better (as did Terrence C. Carson, who was rudely fired from a show on which he was quite literally the best character). The series finale was a cop-out, and I am offended that they would treat their invested audience with such blatant disregard. 4/10.



“ Let’s make this amazing, cute, loving couple, give them the best character development on the entire show, and then have them break up for no reason. ”

To All the Plants I've Killed Before: I'm Sorry

By Brooke Rees

I love floral prints—so much so that if you removed floral patterned clothing from my wardrobe, I would be left with one black turtleneck and an accompanying pair of mom jeans I bought to dress like my style icon, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson in THAT photo (you know the one). I wear flower crowns, have metal straws, use reusable bags, and own several pairs of overalls. I’ve checked all the boxes for someone whose apartment should look like they are in the third round of Jumanji, head to toe covered in aesthetic plant life and with Robin Williams unshaven in the corner. (Oh how I wish both of those were true.) As much as I would love to be a plant mom, it seems that the court would almost certainly not grant me custody, given the track record that I am about to describe:

As a college going away present from one of my high school friends, I was gifted a terrarium

with several small cactus plants. Virtually indestructible, right? Unfortunately for them, my powers know no bounds. Within the first few weeks, I had completely killed all of them. Instead of a green thumb, I inadvertently gave them a green middle finger. I thought the rules for plants were pretty easy: water and sun. Turns out, *too* much water, especially for a cactus, will also kill them. So much for the girls on Instagram constantly reminding me to stay hydrated. I wonder if their information on tummy-flattening teas could also be untrue? (Nah, probably not.)

Apparently my bloodthirsty desires had not yet been satiated, for I continued on this journey of owning plants. This time, I branched outside to the wider succulent universe and had maybe about six succulents going at one time. By the end of the semes-

ter, there were no survivors. To assure readers that this was not a flaw with the plants, but rather with me, I will share that one of my friends, Marc, a plant whisperer, rescued one of the fallen succulents leaves and successfully regrew an entirely new plant. It seems like the key to plant success is simply to no longer be in my presence, a phenomenon shared by all my ex-boyfriends (we can pretend they exist).

Basically, you get the picture. I’m most definitely on the FBI’s Most Wanted list at this very moment. I am simply documenting this in case the plants decide they want revenge a-la M. Night Shyamalan’s cinematic masterpiece, *The Happening*. Should that be the case, I would like to now share with the world my current hostages... sorry, I mean “house plants”, that are somehow alive (in one form or another).



This is Pam the Palm. She was the first plant that we bought for our apartment. I did not yet realize that actually being near sunlight would be an important factor in survival. Thus, Pam died a quick death. I share her story because it led to the purchase of another plant (this time fake), which we named “Eternal Pam” in her memory. May she grace any dark, uninhabitable corner in the apartment that we choose.

*In loving memory, Pam the Palm
June 2020 - Maybe 3 weeks later?*

Gone, but not forgotten because we immediately replaced you.



This is Marcus the Ficus. Marcus is the underdog. After six months in my presence, he is definitely not thriving, but he is surviving. Marcus is also a dramatic b*tch and will droop his leaves/wilt the second he’s thirsty. Honestly, this might be the only reason he’s currently alive, because that’s also the only reason I remember to water him. Good job, Marcus—keep hanging in there.

This is Eugene and I have no idea what kind of plant he is. Honestly, Eugene is our forgotten child. I was given him as a gift for my birthday. I like to think of him as a “giving tree” because my mom stuck a bunch of gift cards to various stores around him. Eugene is our least loved plant, and it shows. We have given him several names and forgotten each one, so Eugene is very likely not his birth name. And at one point, Eugene was sitting on the radiator a little too long, and the ends of his leaves started to burn like the fiery plant hell I will be sent to. I took him off the radiator, gave him water, and set him in front of a different window. Time will only tell if Eugene’s fortunes will change.

In summary, I want to be a plant mom but I’m destined to be a plant serial killer. How many more will have to die before I finally give up? I’m not sure, but at least until I’ve had my chlorophyll.



PODCAST



RECOMMENDATIONS

By Silvana Smith

If anyone is on the prowl for some new podcasts to get addicted to, here are a few picks that I've been obsessed with as of late. Whether you're a music fan, TV nerd, or in the mood for some good conversation, these five shows are sure to spark your interest:

Name 3 Songs: A music commentary podcast from hosts Sara Feigin and Jenna Million, where they speak about women on all sides of the music industry for a variety of genres including pop, alternative, emo, indie rock, and much more. As a fellow fangirl who's been a part of online music communities since she was a young, impressionable tween, it was amazing to see a show "created to challenge sexism in the music industry and empower fangirls," made by women with experience in the industry who are helping dismantle the stigma. The show has brought on a lot of amazing guests including music journalists, marketers, stylists, and artists themselves. They also have a great TikTok account full of stories from music's history ranging from cool, unknown facts to overlooked transgressions.

Just Between Us Podcast: The current incarnation of the YouTube comedy duo Allison Raskin and Gaby Dunn, *JBU* explores almost every aspect of life from sex, relationships, and friendships to feminism, money, and careers. This show offers a great support system for navigating through life with an incredibly involved and accepting online community. Having gone through some huge life changes and hard times recently and throughout their career, the

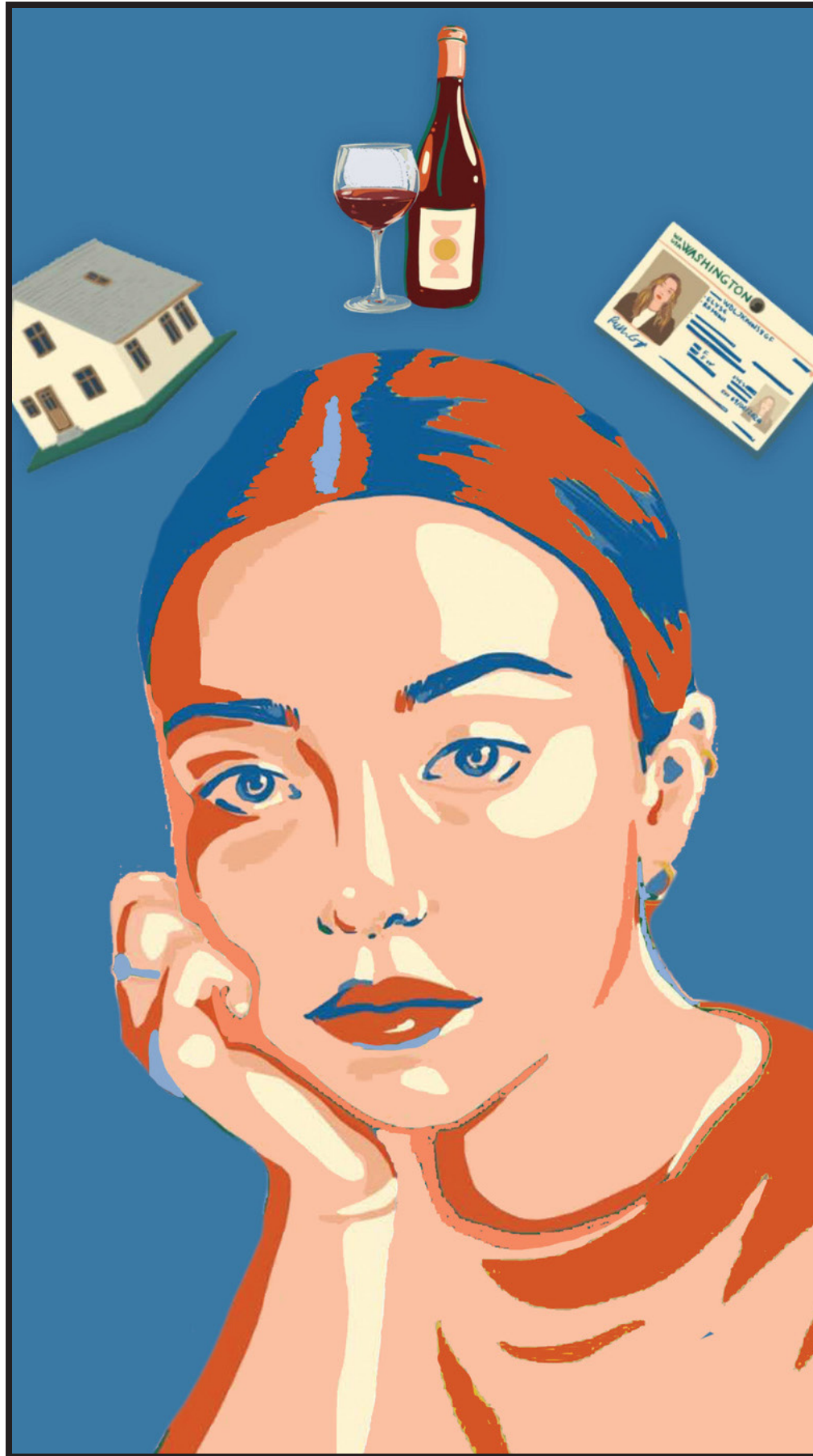
podcast explores heavy topics with a lot of nuance and has been a huge source of support and peace for anyone coping with this strange era we find ourselves in. Having built an audience since their days at BuzzFeed, these hosts have published multiple books (both fiction and nonfiction), performed live shows on tour prior to COVID-19, and produced hundreds of comedy videos—all of which are worth checking out if you enjoy this podcast.

Acting My Age: This podcast from lifestyle YouTuber Rohini Elyse is a great look at the life of a 23-year-old zillennial who's finding her way through life, making mistakes, and exploring various topics from astrology to sex positivity. With a creative, metaphysical vibe while staying very down-to-earth, this podcast is a lil woo-woo at times but a perfect rec for anyone interested in self-exploration and thinking deeply about the connections you form with the world around you.

I saw ur tweet, r u ok?: The new podcast from YouTuber Nicole Rafiee, co-hosted with her friend Jake Ropka, offers some good conversation between two besties who chat about anything, including embarrassing stories, relationship advice, and life as post-grads. The easy and chill flow of the show makes the hour-long episodes feel like you're catching up with the friends you wish you were able to make in 2020. With no real structure, this podcast has been my go-to for putting on in the background for some COVID-free company while I do my little daily tasks.

Shut the Door. Have a Seat: One of my favorite genres of podcasts are ones that follow along with a TV series and review and discuss each episode. Popular podcasts like these include *The Office Ladies* and *The West Wing Weekly*. Recently I've been enjoying the new *Mad Men* podcast named after the beloved Season 3 finale episode, "Shut the Door. Have a Seat." As an avid television fan and critic, I've loved diving deep into storylines, cinematography, and themes with the hosts, Layla and Junior, and fellow fans. I highly suggest this for anyone who's a fan of Golden Age TV or anyone who needs an excuse to finally watch the masterpiece that is *Mad Men* (it's spoiler free!).

All these shows are streaming on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and anywhere else people listen to podcasts (feel free to check out their Instagrams as well!). And if none of these strike your fancy, keep your ears peeled for a new podcast from Morton 3rd Floor Productions, *Zillennial Support Group*; coming soon! ZSG is your safe space to unleash and relive your childhood memories (and trauma) from the late '90s to early '00s. We rewatch and rehash old cultural moments from DCOM movies to *The Amanda Show* as we desperately try to escape the reality of today. But until then, enjoy <3



Did The World Need 'The Kissing Booth'?

I feel so bad for this new generation who were actually fed this crap—which means something coming from me, because we had the *Star Wars* prequels.

By Marriya Schwarz

The 2018 Netflix Original, *The Kissing Booth* centers around Elle Evans (Joey King), your average annoying American teenager who was born at the same exact time as her best friend, Lee Flynn (Joel Courtney), another average American teenager who lives in a gigantic mansion and drives a fancy sports car to their private school—and though Lee is super rich, between the two of them, they can't seem to afford two sandwiches and must share all of their meals. You know... best friend things? They also have a weird friendship in which their lives are dominated by an unclear amount of rules they made when they were six. *You know... best friend things?* To add more drama, Lee has an older brother, Noah (Jacob Elordi), whose only

likes seem to be getting into fights, chewing on toothpicks, and smiling out of one side of his face.

Since researching the movie, there are two key details I wish I knew when I first watched the film: First, the movie is based on a Wattpad story Beth Reekles wrote when she was 15. In hindsight, I should have expected this, seeing as Elle has only two personality traits and the first of these is wanting to date Noah Flynn, even though it'll ruin her friendship with Lee. We learn that the first Christmas she remembers was when she was six, that she went as a cowboy for Halloween, and that she failed at Seven Minutes in Heaven, but we know nothing about her wants, desires, or *anything*.

The other thing I discovered is that the script was written by Vince

Marcello, a man in his late 40s. In hindsight, I *also* should have expected this, seeing as Elle's other personality trait is that she got boobs over the summer. And the fact that Elle is a virgin is grossly highlighted maybe 50 times throughout the movie. Now, as someone who didn't go on a date until she was seventeen, I promise we don't all just stay at home in a mindless daze as we wait for a gentleman caller to whisk us away and take us to the sock hop or cotillion. But Marcello wouldn't know this, since he's clearly never met a teenager. This is obvious in the fact that the following phrases are used: "lady bump," "Are you Gucci?", and "Don't grind coochies." There's also only one BIPOC

character in the whole movie, who is resigned to just say things like, “I love this hoe!”

The movie begins with another weird reminder that Elle has never had a ‘womanly form’ before. (However, it also seems like Elle has never been a person before, since we see montages of her putting lipstick on her cheek, and she often tries to have conversations with people while they’re in the middle of making out with someone else.) On the first day of school, Elle’s particular blunder is that she rips her pants and she’s forced to wear the only other school-issued bottom she has, which is a tiny mini skirt. To Vince Marcello’s credit, he also may never have been to a school before, much less a private school. But at my private school, the dress code included school-approved clothing *and* what length each item was. If my school pants ripped, I wouldn’t

trade them for *another* dress code violating option; I would just wear jeans and take the L. But of course, like Elle’s boobs, she was also born just over the summer, so she wears a mini skirt that clearly shows her underwear. And in case you weren’t expecting it, a mindless jock quickly slaps her ass. Although this starts as an empowering moment where she states she wasn’t asking for sexual harassment, this all falls apart when she

decides she wants to give him her number.

And after Elle and Lee decide to put on a kissing booth to save the dance club at the fundraising carnival, Elle becomes the object of popularity once the ‘OMG Girls’ talk to her—we know they’re popular because they only eat one banana and drink water for lunch. And they encourage her to go to Noah’s party, where Elle, who’s more Sim than human, has, of course, never

“Imagine having to go to physical therapy and telling another patient who was in a car accident that you busted your neck by making out with your brother’s best friend.”

been drunk before and begins taking off all her clothes. Later, this is almost exactly repeated when Elle—sober this time—happens to wander into the boy’s locker room instead of the women’s restroom and starts stripping right at the sink. To Vince Marcello’s credit, this is how all women’s bathrooms work. Even if you’re just taking a shit, you must discard your shirt before going into the stall.

Finally, we get to the carni-

val where the dance club makes more money than all of the other clubs—probably because the entire student body just hangs out at the kissing booth to applaud when Elle and Noah kiss. Although she knows that this could ruin her friendship with Lee, Elle and Noah continue their makeout session in a gazebo, where it’s clear that this is probably the worst duo of actors Netflix could have hired. While Jacob Elordi is 6’5”, Joey King is only 5’3”, meaning that when having a conversation, these characters can never be in the same camera shot. Besides, the kiss just looks uncomfortable with the height difference. Imagine having to go to physical therapy and telling another patient who was in a car accident that you busted your neck by making out with your brother’s best friend.

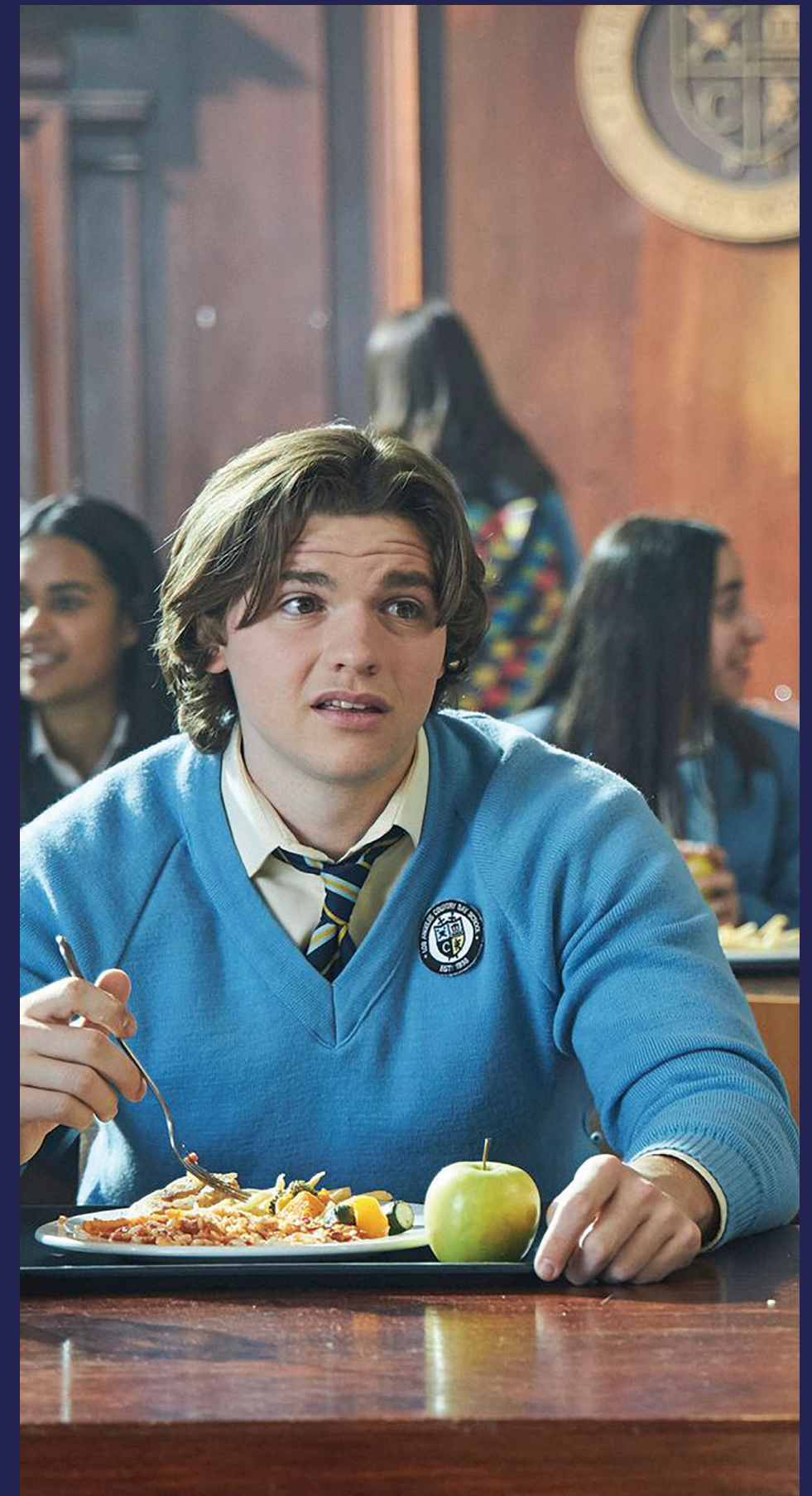
And of course, Elle being Elle, she decides to solve this romantic debacle by making a pro and con list. The pros include that he’s hot, a good kisser, and smells yummy. (At some point, this is just offensive, Vince Marcello.) And the cons are that it’ll ruin her friendship, he rides a stupid motorcycle, her dad doesn’t approve, they constantly fight, he’s a player, and that he’s controlling. Which are pretty big cons, seeing as she didn’t include *any* facets of his character on the pro side. Nevertheless, she later gives him her

virginity right in front of the Hollywood sign.

Ultimately, this relationship falls apart because—surprise, surprise—Lee finds out about the secret relationship and doesn’t take it well! But like all cheesy Netflix movies, it works out in the end, and Elle and Noah decide to pursue a long-distance relationship, even though she’s essentially dating his brother.

So yes, I would argue that this movie never needed to be made. Yes, it was just a bad movie. Elle Evans is one of the worst characters I’ve ever seen; she’s an attempt at being feminist while being entirely misogynistic. But just logically, the movie shouldn’t have been made just because there’s no way that these characters even made it to age seventeen. Twice, we see Lee jump off of a second floor balcony and into a pool, and later, Noah falls out of Elle’s second or third floor window and lands on a stone path *totally fine*.

In conclusion, my feelings can be best summarized by Elle’s final line of the movie, “And to think, all of this happened just because of a kissing booth.” Honestly, there was no point in the kissing booth, other than using it as a plot device to make Elle and Noah kiss. Although it’s supposed to raise money for dance club, we never see them participate in this club even once. (Although, they do play a dance game at an arcade, and I’m pretty sure that Elle and Lee are funneling school funds for this, and I think this should be a federal crime) But this didn’t stop Netflix from creating at least two more installments. Personally, I’m hoping someone shows up to the kissing booth with mono next time and takes them all down, but that’s just me. ■





Vintage-y
Jazz
Music to
Listen
to Wine
Drunk
and
Heart-
broken

By Silvana Smith

Since most of the world has been snowed in or just stuck at home because of the (*cough*) panorama, I thought I'd offer some music recommendations for the genre that goes perfectly with a warm cup of tea (or some mulled wine *wink*) and your favorite weighted blanket whilst you look forlornly out your frosted window. In the shadow of Valentine's Day and the gloomy clouds of winter, unless you're one of the lucky coupled ones, it's easy to feel a little down-hearted and in need of a good wallow during this cold winter month.

Whether it was your first Valentine's Day since your pandemic break-up, the lack of sun's really getting to you, or you're just a little sad about that Tinder match you ghosted, it's time to relish in your heartbreak, play up the drama, and put on some sad vintage-y jazz music. Even if your personal life is as non-existent as your faith in the American government, now is the time to pretend your husband's lost at war, your beau abandoned you at the sock hop, or you're afraid of getting drafted; any excuse to put on a little Ella, pour some wine, and make these long, dark nights as aesthetic as possible.

Besides the historical context of the immense loneliness of 2021, I was also inspired by some TV shows I've been watching recently that take place during the days of popular jazz music. From *Mad Men* (AMC) and *The Crown* (Netflix Seasons 1 & 2) to the overlooked cult classic, *The Hour* (BBC), to say these were some of the most aesthetically pleasing shows I've ever seen would be an understatement. The coiffed hair, tragic love stories, the Cold War, vintage clothes—they make these depressing, problematic worlds of the past look so beautiful. So, if the present-day gloom is making you want to escape to the much more classy and sophisticated melancholy of the past, here are some jazzy melodies to take you away. This playlist provides a healthy amount of wartime classics with a dash of select modern pieces, and a hint of some sexy French depression tracks.



Angel Eyes // Ella Fitzgerald (1960)

*"So drink up all you people
Order anything you see
Have fun you happy people
The laughs and the jokes on met"*

This song's inclusion was inspired by the scene in *The Crown* where Princess Margaret, played by Vanessa Kirby, breaks down over her love for Captain Townsend, whose marriage proposal was denied by the Queen. Lost without the man she wanted, she turns to alcohol and jazz to soothe her emotions—an icon; my inspiration. Although I've never been through something like that, I do channel that heartbroken energy whenever my Trader Joe's cashier doesn't flirt with me.

Body and Soul // Billie Holiday (1957)

*"What lies before me
A future that's stormy
A winter that's gray and cold
Unless there's magic the end will be tragic"*

None of us truly knows what lies before us, especially underneath the haze of an unending national disaster that hit us the hardest this past winter. What's worse is to feel completely ready to commit yourself to someone—body and soul—and have them feel as uncertain about you as our country's future.

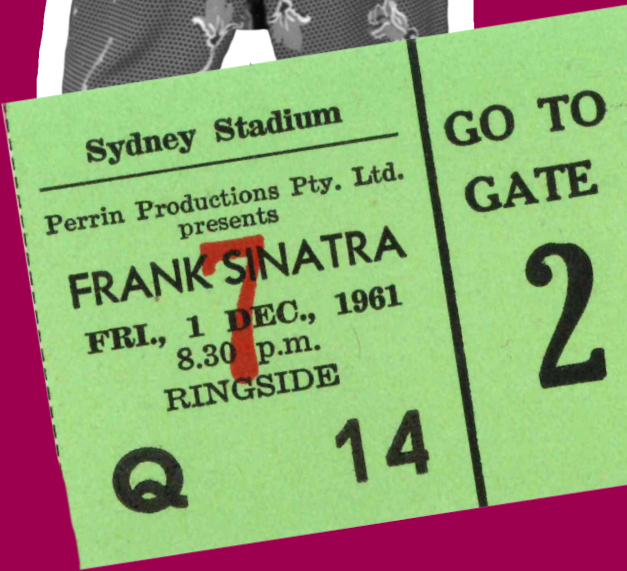
I Can't Get Started // Ella Fitzgerald (1955)

*"Dream, both day and night of you
And what good does it do?"*

This is a song from a woman who has lived an adventurous and full life, but the one thing she can't seem to do is sort out her love life. Although I don't know anyone as accomplished as the woman in this song, many can resonate with the feeling of romantic false starts. And during a time of Zoom calls and lockdowns, sometimes dreams are all we have.

I'll Be Seeing You // Billie Holiday (1944)

The perfect ballad for anyone who hasn't seen their loved ones in almost a year. *"I'll be looking at the moon, but I'll be seeing you."* Whether you've been separated for far too long or lost someone for good, the song ruminates in the



Music

space in your heart where they will reside forever.

Fools Rush In // Frank Sinatra (1960)

*“Fools rush in, where wise men never go
But wise men never fall in love”*

If you’ve ever felt stupid in love, take comfort in the fact that you’re not alone. Drink up.

Misty // Johnny Mathis (1959)

*“You can say that you’re leading me on
But it’s just what I want you to do
Don’t you notice how hopelessly I’m lost?
That’s why I’m following you”*

You might recognize this song from *Silver Linings Playbook*, but if not, it’s still a tender song of longing well worth the listen.

The Hour // Daniel Giorgetti (2011)

The theme song for the cancelled-too-soon BBC series *The Hour* is the perfect 50’s jazzy intro. The show is set during 1956 about a newsroom investigating communist spies, a tone that is definitely reflected in the ‘ticking’ percussion and eerie saxophone. It’s a show that also features a drunk and forlorn Vanessa Kirby playing a young woman unable to marry the man she loves. 10/10 would highly recommend this Emmy-winning miniseries.

Solitude // Billie Holiday (1952)

*“In my solitude
You haunt me
With dreadful ease
Of days gone by”*

No one is allowed to come for me about how much Billie Holiday is on this list. It’s not my fault her music is fantastic and encapsulates so many of the emotions we’re feeling during this pandemic. With “Solitude,” this song hits the nail on the head with the feelings of isolation we’ve all become accustomed to. The lines, “I sit in my chair/ And filled with despair/ There’s no one could be so sad/ With gloom everywhere/ I sit and I stare/ I know that I’ll soon go mad” were actually written about how I spent my Saturday night last week. True story.

Le Moulin // Yann Tiersen (2001)

From the soundtrack of the French modern classic, *Ame-lie*, is a melancholic track from composer Yann Tiersen. With an accordion and piano-driven song, there is no culture that makes depression as fashionable as the French. Please also check out the full soundtrack from the iconic film. Although it’s filled with much happier tunes as well, I could honestly listen to the album straight through on repeat.

Impossible Year // Panic! At the Disco (2016)

*“The scars souvenir
That tattoo, your last bruise
This impossible year”*

Although not actually a song from the past, the jazzy-Frank-Sinatra vibes are potent. The 2016 lyrics still resonate as the past

year has felt utterly impossible to get through. Despite the scars of 2020 that we all still bear, we carry on. But just for tonight, don’t keep it all inside. Don’t be afraid to feel the gravity of our country’s catastrophe, if only for the drama.

You Only Live Twice // Nancy Sinatra (1966)

*“You only live twice
Or so it seems
One life for yourself
And one for your dreams”*

This haunting track from Frank Sinatra’s daughter was featured in the Season 5 finale of *Mad Men* and was actually the theme song of the 1967 James Bond film by the same name. A lot of us have been faced with our own mortality this year. If the life you are currently living isn’t what you thought it would be, take comfort in the lives you live inside your head.

Days of Wine and Roses // Henry Mancini (1962)

This serves as the theme song for a 1962 movie of the same name about lovers dealing with self-destructive behaviors. The title comes from a poem by Ernest Dowson that’s recited in the film: “They are not long, the days of wine and roses: Out of a misty dream, our path emerges for a while, then closes, within a dream.”

Etta James // I’d Rather Go Blind (1968)

This infamous blues song and her soulful vocal delivery make this track a 1960s classic, much like the great Etta James herself.

Etta James was a famous Motown Singer that defined much of the musical era. Her life story also inspired parts of the movies *DreamGirls* and *Cadillac Records*, specifically the roles played by Jennifer Hudson and Beyonce. You can find modern renditions of this song by both Beyonce and Dua Lipa on Youtube.

Vienna // Billy Joel (1977)

“You can’t be everything you want to be before your time”

Another non-vintage jazz number (unless you’re proper Gen Z and the ‘80s are vintage for you), but the sentiment and sad piano melodies were too good to leave off this list. Here’s to hoping a better future still waits for us. Although there may not be a modern-day equivalent of taking your phone off the hook, it’s important to remember that it’s okay to take a few days off, log out of socials, and step away from the world. I promise the chaos will still be there when you get back.

Gloomy Sunday // Billy Holiday (1941)

*“Sunday is gloomy, my hours are slumberless
Dearest, the shadows, I live with are numberless”*

The first part of 2021 definitely

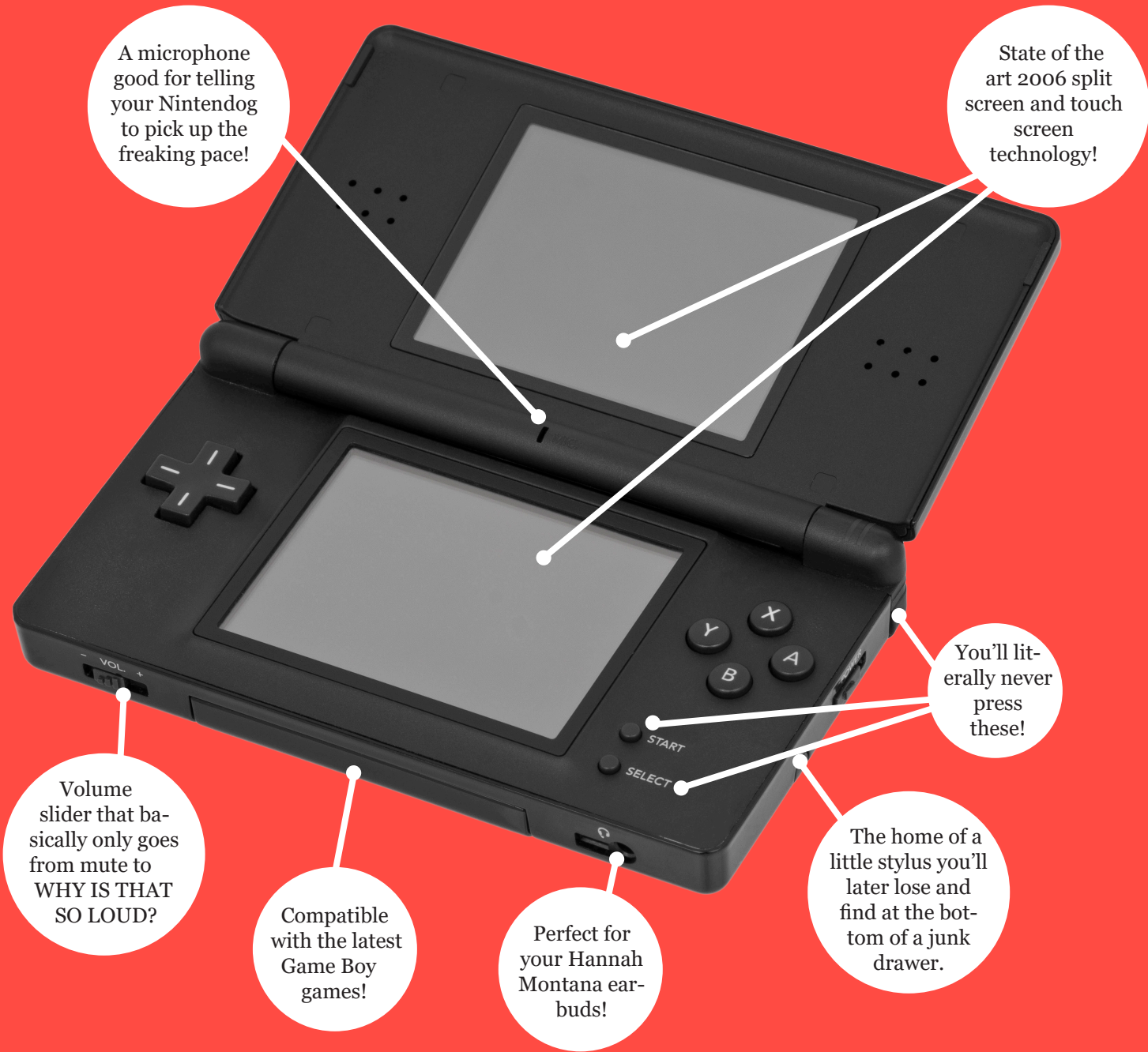
felt like a prolonged feeling of the ‘Sunday scaries.’ With the end still far off, many of us have been hitting the pandemic wall. The mundanity of another Monday working from the couch can feel super defeating. Although the subject of this Hungarian song is a lot more somber, Holiday’s rendition captures the intense feelings of loss and despair that haunt this modern era.

Georgia on my Mind // Ray Charles (1960)

*“Oh Georgia, no peace I find
Just an old sweet song”*

During a time that hasn’t seen a lot of peace, the good state of Georgia has definitely provided a bright spot this past year. This prolific and beautiful melody is included as an homage to the wonderful people and organizers that helped turn a voter suppressed state blue, but also as a sweet song about an enduring love. There’s actually a film about Ray Charles that features his history with this song, including getting banned from Georgia, and then later having this song become the official song of the state. This song has many popular covers from other jazz artists and modern-day musicians alike. (I recommend the Atlanta band, Microwave’s version for any emo kids out there.)

TLDR; Tired of the current historical context of today? Let’s travel back in time to a world with much of the same terrible problems but with a cute vintage aesthetic. Listen along, and spend the last few weeks of winter in a jazz-filled, morose haze. (Actual heartbreak optional—we’re only in it for the aesthetic, y’all) Don’t be afraid to romance yourself, and romanticize your own life. What the hell else are we to do in times like these? So, take your 2020 trauma and make it vintage.



Reviewing the Nintendo Everyone's Talking About

By Marriya Schwarz

While everyone in my generation is trying to sell their DS on eBay since none of the new games work on the platform, I have done the opposite. Instead, I have scoured the internet and spent an embarrassing amount of money on new games circa the early 2010s, since my collection was pretty solely Disney Channel-based. Currently, I have around 15 games, although, for some reason, I can't get my DS to play GameBoy games anymore, so *Zoey 101* is heartbreakingly ruled out.

What I love about the Nintendo DS is not just that it makes me feel like an elementary school student where my only real worries were multiplication tables and remembering my three lines as Squash #3 in the seminal classic Thanksgiving school play, *Turkeys Go On Strike*, but also, as someone with De Quervain's Tenosynovitis, the platform actually doesn't cause me much discomfort. With my chronic pain, I have trouble with anything involving my thumb, so that means gripping, pushing, etc. Especially with overuse, my right hand, being my dominant hand, is basically always in pain. However, what I love most about the Nintendo DS is that most of the games rely heavily on the weird little stylus that is so lightweight that I barely have to grip it and the control pad, which is located on the left side, so that my less fucked-up hand is more used. It's kind of perfect? With apps on the iPhone, I find that a lot of it is thumb-based, so I'm less crushing candy and more crushing my chances for normal functionality. And I've found that the Wii is so movement-based that I can't expect to play bowling on the Wii Play and breathe for a week or so after I pull muscles in my chest. Therefore, the Nintendo DS is the perfect platform for me... it just means that I'm stuck with terrible graphics.

But for almost solely my own benefit, here are my rankings and thoughts on all 14 of my games:

14. *High School Musical: Makin' the Cut!*



I was a huge *High School Musical* fan back in the day: I watched the premieres of all of the films, went to the *High School Musical* concert (with Drew Seeley filling in for Zac Efron), owned four different themed board games, and I even had a *High School Musical* birthday party where we played 'Pin the Kiss on Troy Bolton.' Therefore, it pains me to announce this, but this game sucks. The basics of this storyline are that Sharpay has signed up the gang for a national music competition, and you have to compete at each level. However, they're also dealing with issues like Taylor thinking that Chad is cheating on her and Sharpay having trouble sleeping, which leads to great dialogue from Gabriella, like "I've had a white noise machine ever since I was little. It sounds like a waterfall - it helps me fall asleep in a new place."

But we don't really influence these storylines at all. We just get four slides of dialogue and then we move on! For the game part, you dance along to songs by clicking on circles when they turn green. It's honestly pretty boring.

Albeit a little delayed because I think the hype over the Nintendo Switch and *Animal Crossing* has died down, but I'm finally getting around to reviewing the 2006 Nintendo DS Lite that has been at the bottom of my dance bag for the past nine years (It barely smells like feet anymore!)

Gaming

Pros: There’s nostalgia? I guess it’s fun to learn that it’s canon that Gabriella sleeps with a white noise machine?

Cons: The game is incredibly easy, and you don’t even get to watch the animation because you’re too busy trying to make sure the characters don’t fall on their asses.

Pain scale: 0/5 Crème Brulees. Most of it is stylus based!

Overall gaming experience: .5/5 cookies that Zeke makes that Sharpay says are the best things she’s ever tasted but then proceeds to throw them on the floor in the end credits scene of the first film.

13. Hannah Montana



Okay so at this point, you may assume that I’m a little biased against my Disney Channel games and you are 100% right. But no hate; this game is interesting! Basically, we start out with Robby Ray Stewart telling Miley that an anonymous note was left for her, saying that they know Miley Stewart is really Hannah Montana! Gasp! (Could it be someone from the whole freak-ing town she told her secret to? Honestly, did we not expect this to get out?) And then he tells her to just go to school like nothing happened. This note threatened to spread her secret. Why are you telling your teenage daughter to solve this mystery, Robert? Go to the FBI or something!

Pros: Honestly, the story isn’t half bad.

Cons: Movement in this game is just super awkward. Plus, it looks awful.

Pain scale: 1/5 cheap blonde wigs (mostly stylus based)

Overall gaming experience: 1.5/5 Sweet Niblets. (I’m trying to be strict with my ratings here, people.)

12. Hannah Montana: Music Jam



Evidently, one *Hannah Montana* game was not enough for me because I have a second one! This was always my favorite *Hannah Montana* game and I see why! Instead of a creepy stalker storyline, we have Hannah dealing with a competing pop star who can play her own instruments. But as Miley, she’s also dealing with losing her best friend to the new girl in town.

Pros: Movement and graphics are both a lot better in this game. Also, the storyline isn’t bad. Plus, the ice skating game is *chef’s kiss*

Cons: There isn’t that much to do, so you finish an act after just putting up like one poster.

Pain scale: 3/5 glittery outfits (split between stylus and control pad)

Overall gaming experience: 1.8/5 Ohhh Woah woah yeahhhs

11. Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix



I know. I wanted this to be further up the list too, but it just. was. not. it. We follow some of the story of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, but movement in this game is awkward, and you almost can never move because Hermione or Ron stand completely in the way (it’s like Stupefy, b****, get out of my way.) Honestly, it’s a pretty frustrating experience.

Pros: At least we can easily say this isn’t the worst thing J.K. Rowling has ever done.

Cons: Once you finish the storyline, you have to play what feels like hundreds of mini games that I guess you were supposed to finish along the way, but no one informed you of that (You correct ‘LevioSA,’ Hermione, but you keep your mouth shut this time?). Plus, in Potions class, you have to blow into your microphone (Sorry. During the time of the pandemic, no one should use my DS at this point) but you have to really blow until you get severely lightheaded. I started just putting my hair dryer on cool and blowing that into the mic, which does work but doesn’t make you feel good about yourself.

Pain scale: 2/5 Grims (mostly stylus but the amount of control pad use did hurt a tiny bit)

Overall gaming experience: 2/5 Gobstones (honestly there was so much potential here.)

10. Marvel Super Hero Squad



Thank goodness I only spent around \$6 on this because it was yet another letdown. Basically, you get six low-tier superheroes and try to fight Doctor Doom as he tries to get all six fractals to create the Infinity Sword. Honestly, levels are pretty quick and easy and there isn’t really any fun in replaying them.

Pros: There are superheroes? It features the Hulk?

Cons: It’s pretty repetitive

Pain scale: 3.5/5 Hulk smashes (very little stylus use)

Overall gaming experience: 2.3/5 arrows that Hawkeye takes into battle and then he’s done for the day. Not necessarily worth shelling out money for.

9. Cooking Mama



I know, I know. In what world does *Cooking Mama* beat out Harry

Potter and Marvel? (Although I’m thinking we were cheated out of a *Cooking Mama* crossover where she just casually lifts Mjölnir to cut off the ends of bean sprouts.) But there are so many options! From miso soup to spaghetti bolognese, Mama teaches you how to cook everything! Just... don’t get her angry... (I always liked how she says, “Don’t worry. Mama will fix it.” Like Mama, I don’t mean to worry you, but your eyes are on fire. Your eyebrows must be WRECKED, dude.)

Pros: It’s straightforward with a lot of options, and back in the day, having this game made you the coolest.

Cons: It’s not the most fun thing to play over and over again; it gets old easily. Plus, this lady puts ketchup on everything? And it kind of makes me uncomfortable?

Pain scale: 0/5 rice in omelets (all stylus based! Beautiful!)

Overall game experience: 2.7/5 eyelashes Mama has left after all that fire. Don’t get me wrong—it’s a fun game! It’s just a little boring?

8. Nintendogs



This was my very first Nintendo game, and I’ve been away so long that I think my Nintendogs thought I died. Also, now all my dogs are afraid of sticks. Did I do this? In the game, you get to raise dogs, train them, take them for walks, pick up their poop, etc. It’s kind of like a Furby, but you get

more power.

Pros: It’s dogs—you can’t help but love it.

Cons: There’s not that much to do because there aren’t really missions. It’s kind of the same deal as *Cooking Mama* with being repetitive, except I actually feel loved by my dogs. (I think I’m one poorly chopped onion away from Mama putting me inside a fried gyoza.)

Pain scale: 0/5 weird Archie Hubbs-isms (all stylus based, baby!)

Overall gaming experience: 3/5 pizza discs. I love my dogs.

7. Professor Layton and the Diabolical Box



This is particularly upsetting because I was working so hard to have a Professor Layton moment for myself, but it just wasn’t worth the hype? Like yes, it’s fun, but it’s also kind of boring. I mean it’s not a bad game, but I expected more. The plot is basically that Professor Layton’s mentor, Dr. Schrader, obtains the Elysian Box. The myth is that this box will kill anyone who opens it. When Layton and his ‘young apprentice’, Luke, visit Dr. Schrader, they find him unconscious and the box missing. Honestly, I feel like we should learn from this and not go after the box that’s killing everyone? But Professor Layton is a professor who doesn’t seem to know the definition of “self-preservation.”

Gaming

Pros: It's riddle-based with a good story.
Cons: It's kind of boring. A lot of the puzzles don't feel like they contribute to the overall story—like Professor Layton's pal is unconscious, but, yes, let's hear about the puzzle this reminded you of. There is a TIME and a PLACE, sir. Also, the relationship between Professor Layton and this small boy seems weird, no?
Pain scale: .5/5 small child detectives (basically all stylus use)
Overall gaming experience: 3.1/5 "I think I've got it"s

6. Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games



I'll be perfectly honest: I think this game would have a higher rating if I wasn't absolutely terrible at it. The person who had this game before me was so. much. better. I'm only okay at the figure skating game? Maybe because of my training with *Hannah Montana: Music Jams*? Basically, it's a game inspired by the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver. There are a bunch of different options like curling, figure skating, luge, etc.
Pros: It's my first Mario game!
Cons: It's actually difficult for me? But maybe that's a good thing?
Pain scale: 4/5 Mario jokes I got as a child (thanks for the name, Mom & Dad!) (pretty control pad-heavy)
Overall gaming experience: 3.5/5 Luigi jokes that my sister didn't have to experience, which isn't fair.

5. Sims 2



Let's just say there's a reason why Reddit thinks this game is secretly a horror game parading as the *Sims*. Basically, you have some car trouble, land in Strangetown, and they explain that their last hotel manager just quit so you have to take over the job. Like... um no? Why don't you just fix my car? Plus, Strangetown is this weird town where it's completely surrounded by sand that drains your energy if you even attempt to run away. Because no one can leave, everyone just gets drunk, hangs out in your hotel, and pees on your floor. You have to deal with weird tenants like a crime boss and an evil robot? Oh and did I mention that the town is constantly dealing with alien invasions... that YOU have to fight off with either a water gun or a rat suit. Yeah.
Pros: The storyline is something you'll never stop thinking about.
Cons: It's actually pretty quick to finish and then you're just doing general hotel maintenance for the rest of the game, which is fairly boring. Part of your responsibilities is cheering up sad guests, calming down angry guests, sobering up drunk guests (they call them 'loopy' but we know what's up), and making out with romantic guests. (YEAH. WHAT'S UP WITH THAT? DOES #METOO NOT EXIST IN STRANGETOWN.) (Sometimes I get annoyed with guys constantly trying to kiss me in the game,

so I spray them with water guns.)
Pain scale: 4/5 alien organs I have to dissect (It's pretty control pad heavy, but there is stylus use. However, this is the only game I've seen that also uses the Right and Left buttons on the DS, which is an added hand strain)
Overall gaming experience: 3.7/5 times the mayor's office catches on fire and I have to go at it with a water gun when there should be PEOPLE FOR THIS.

4. LEGO Batman



Obviously, the LEGO games are amazing and they genuinely hold up. As quoted in the Wikipedia article I found because I have no brain power anymore, "Batman's most dangerous foes have all escaped from Arkham Asylum and divided themselves into three groups of five, each led by a well-known villain with plans to achieve a personal goal." What I really like about the LEGO games is that you can just break *everything*. Like the Joker is about to blow up a cathedral but hold up, Imma break all his stuff first.
Pros: The levels are a good length; there's always a lot to do and a lot to break.
Cons: It's very easy. Basically, the way that you find all the different assembly pieces guides you on how you're supposed to get from one point to another. It was super straight forward, which can be good!
Pain scale: 4/5 Batarangs (I'll be

honest. This one hurt a little. It's very control pad heavy, which can be problematic.)
Overall gaming experience: 4/5 times I died falling into green goo.

3. LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga



Following all of the movies (obviously not the newest ones), there's a LOT to do in *LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga*. I actually found that this one was a bit more challenging than the Batman game, since there are a bunch of different options and ways you can complete things or get side-tracked. Plus, the bosses were actually somewhat challenging. Unlike *Batman* where you're maybe facing two goons and then they die and you're left alone, for a lot of *Star Wars*, you're constantly dealing with people shooting at you.
Pros: It's so worth the money because there are so many levels.
Cons: The biggest problem is that the lightsabers are really hard to use and you need some space to swing it. Unfortunately, your little computer-controlled sidekick gets so close to you. I probably killed Obi-Wan a good 100 times because that boy would not give me space. Then, I was of course forced to stare at myself in the mirror for a long period of time and wonder... I've always wanted to be Princess Leia... but have I really been Darth Vader all along?
Pain scale: 4.5/5 beheaded Obi-

Wans (My hands absolutely cannot handle the chase levels so I've hit a wall in this game. Someone with functioning hands please finish it for me?)
Overall gaming experience: 4.3/5 adorable little R2-D2 screams, which maybe I shouldn't find adorable?

2. Scooby-Doo! First Frights

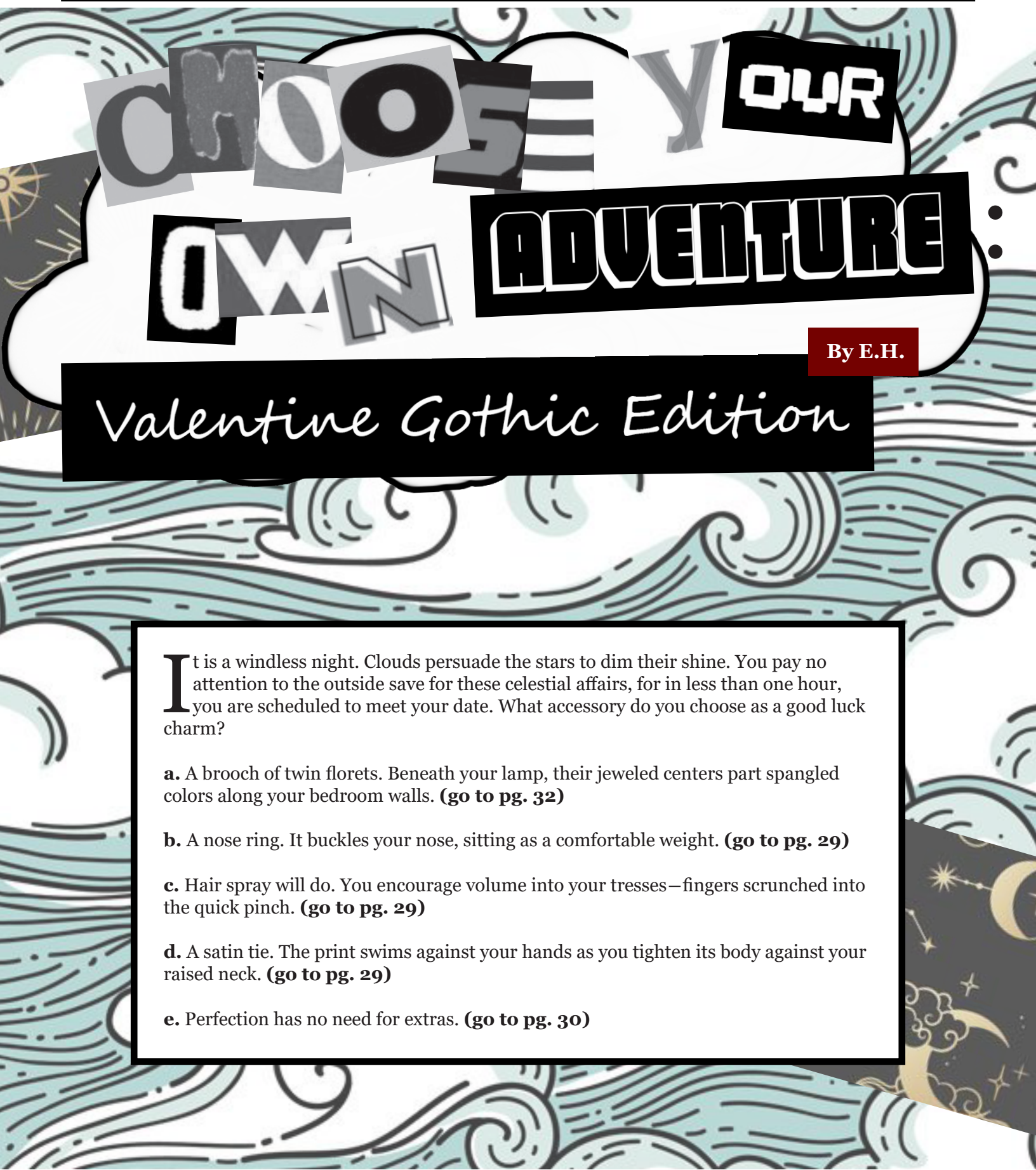


This is kind of a controversial pick because *Scooby-Doo! First Frights* is clearly trying to be a LEGO game, and it's somehow better? I'm so sorry—please don't come for me. Basically, the whole concept is exactly the same: you can break things and instead of getting little LEGO studs, you get Scooby snacks. The storyline follows Mystery Inc. as they go on new mysteries, and you get to decide who is responsible by the end (which is a lot of power for a game for children.)
Pros: It's actually challenging, and the bosses are *awesome*.
Cons: The graphics look awful. They really did Fred dirty, and he doesn't even have an ascot!
Pain scale: 4/5 "Ruh Rohs" (basically the same as the LEGO games)
Overall gaming experience: 4.7/5 "Let's split up, gang"s. Why was this Fred's catchphrase? That's a terrible catchphrase.

1. Narnia: Prince Caspian



Okay, so you're telling me I had the perfect game this whole time and didn't even make it past the FIRST TASK as a child? Sigh. Basically, we follow the storyline of Prince Caspian with Caspian trying to escape his Uncle Miraz, meeting up with the Pevensie siblings, and then trying to save the kingdom of Narnia from a corrupt ruler. You have battles, a storyline, ogres, and really everything. Also, the graphics aren't bad! It's pretty simplistic, but not bad at all.
Pros: It's somewhat challenging, since each battle is like 5 mini games at once. But it's a good story that puts less emphasis on the Susan/Prince Caspian relationship, *like it should be*.
Cons: There's some pretty fast gameplay.
Pain scale: 2/5 Turkish Delights worth selling your whole family to an ice queen (basically, it's all stylus use—EVEN MOVEMENT. AND IT'S NOT JERKY)
Overall gaming experience: 5/5 Aslans not coming in until the LAST FREAKING SECOND. Bruh, just stay close by.



CHOOSE YOUR
OWN ADVENTURE

By E.H.

Valentine Gothic Edition

It is a windless night. Clouds persuade the stars to dim their shine. You pay no attention to the outside save for these celestial affairs, for in less than one hour, you are scheduled to meet your date. What accessory do you choose as a good luck charm?

- a. A brooch of twin florets. Beneath your lamp, their jeweled centers part spangled colors along your bedroom walls. **(go to pg. 32)**
- b. A nose ring. It buckles your nose, sitting as a comfortable weight. **(go to pg. 29)**
- c. Hair spray will do. You encourage volume into your tresses—fingers scrunched into the quick pinch. **(go to pg. 29)**
- d. A satin tie. The print swims against your hands as you tighten its body against your raised neck. **(go to pg. 29)**
- e. Perfection has no need for extras. **(go to pg. 30)**



At the restaurant, you both sit with little conversation done. The balloons wilt; your hands swelter; a bell's tinny jilt hangs the air. Your eyes move to measure how tall your date is. Their body heightens, piercing through the restaurant's roof, parting into a dusky continuum. Soon, they break past the night sky, the atmosphere, the sound barrier, then the sepia-divided hollows of space. They tear against reality's fabric, which allows your date's particular existence, but leaves no space for those mortal below. Your vision joins your date's ascension, abandoning physicality, smearing past color and light's worn tandem; there is only the sound of popping balloons.

- FIN -

Interested in another date? Return to pg. 26!

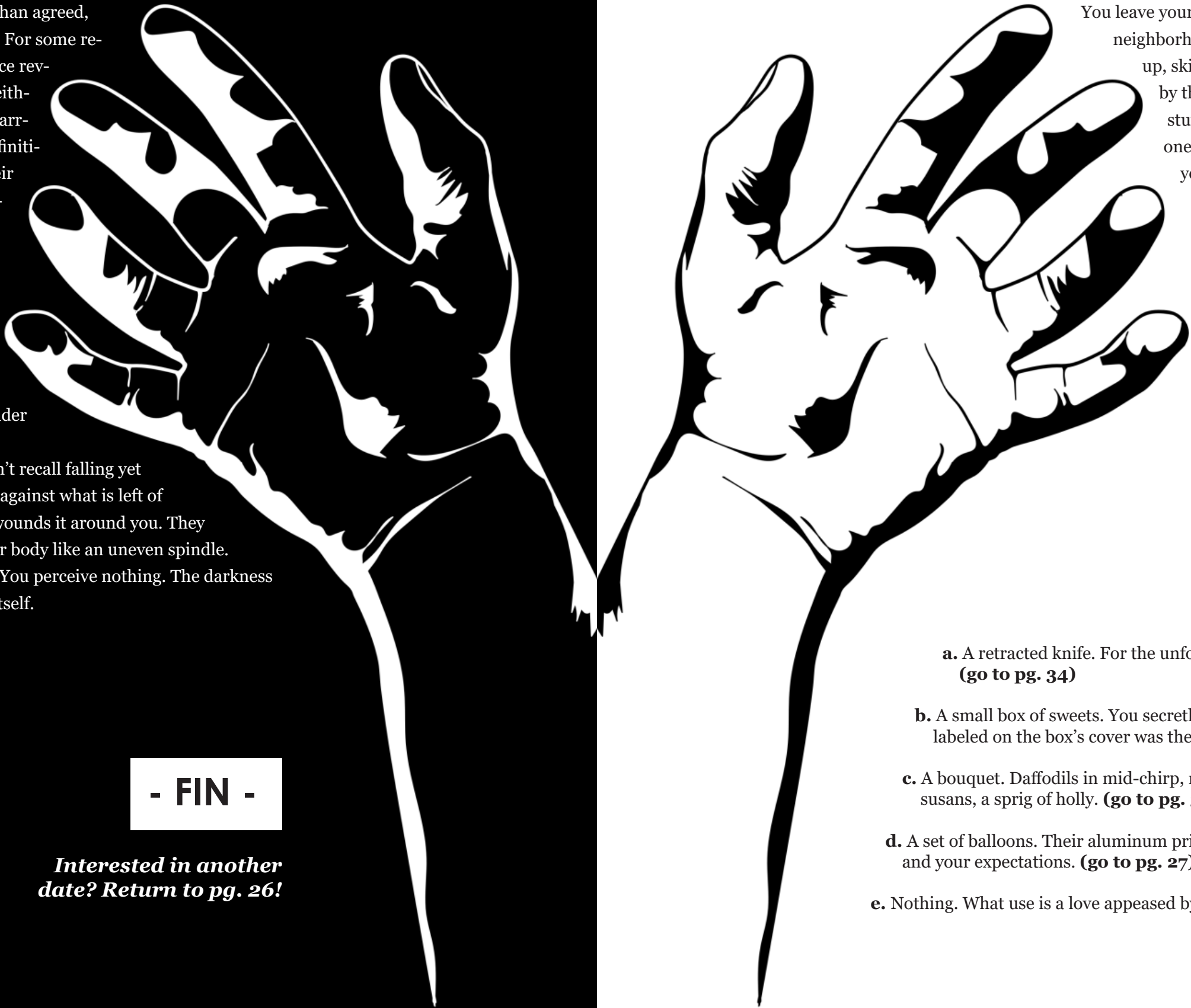
Your date arrives a few minutes later than agreed, but you graciously accept their tardiness. For some reason, the direct memory of your date’s face revolves in constant change. Their eyes are either as wide as freshly minted coins or as narrow as rosemary sprigs. Their lips defy definition: for what is more noteworthy than their call? One cheek permits gravity’s influence; the other protests.

You both partake in a leisurely stroll around the park. There is the usual fare: benches of wooden split backs, willows exhausted by the anticipation of their weight, a lake serving as your reflections’ respite. Things are proceeding as they should until they don’t—a wayward gander bites your knee and snips it in half.

The pain obscures everything. You don’t recall falling yet now you’re on the ground, hands flailing against what is left of your torn knee. Your date spits silk and wounds it around you. They continue in their spinning, wrapping your body like an uneven spindle. A sting ruptures your back then recedes. You perceive nothing. The darkness ahead is not color’s lacking but absence itself.

- FIN -

Interested in another date? Return to pg. 26!



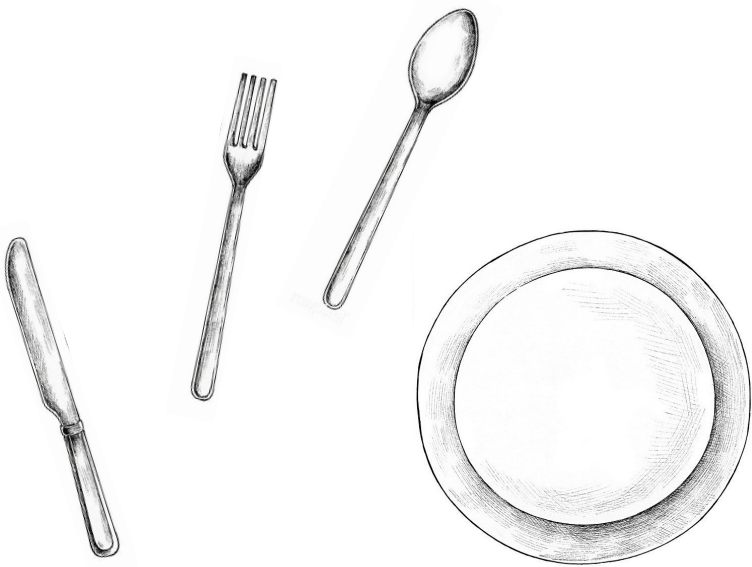
You leave your home for a street corner by the neighborhood deli and liquor store. A breeze picks up, skirting across your knees. One car rumbles by then leaves you in the hazy bask of a stuttering streetlight. Sweat forms; you wipe one hand against your jacket. What is in your other hand?

- a. A retracted knife. For the unfortunate and the unforeseen. (go to pg. 34)
- b. A small box of sweets. You secretly tried one the day before, only to realize labeled on the box’s cover was the number of sweets inside. (go to pg. 31)
- c. A bouquet. Daffodils in mid-chirp, marigold rounds, bristling black-eyed susans, a sprig of holly. (go to pg. 36)
- d. A set of balloons. Their aluminum print crinkles from the pressure of the air and your expectations. (go to pg. 27)
- e. Nothing. What use is a love appeased by tokens? (go to pg. 33)

Glass shatters and wood splinters—there is a roar, its churn and break, the scale of damage revealed once you uncurl yourself from the floor. A meteorite has crashed into your room; you are unharmed though your window, steam-wreathed and jarred open, is not. Later, scientists discover a rare mineral in the blistered stone. You receive a bounty of cash, but after a series of indulgences and hastily made investments, the money runs thin. There is just enough to pay your taxes—tis the season.



You forgo your date for a paltry sum, but the chance is still there. Redeem yourself by re-turning to pg. 26!



After dinner, you and your date order dessert. Your plates have been exchanged for a clean set: sterling cutlery, persimmon leaves encrusted by porcelain, a pregnant wine glass. Infused in the air is the scent of wax and rubbing alcohol. A waiter sets a pair of gloves on your plate. You instinctively put them on as your date lays themselves on the table.

They coax their shirt open, exposing their chest, skin receding like a flower's petal-tuck, organs brought to reveal. Nothing raises your concern but that lush, beating heart, pale ridges of hardened muscle seizing along its chambers. The ridges shift and open—eyes of fallow cornea, pupils constricted to a tight-lipped gasp, veins burdened blue.

The heart blinks wearily and you no longer can afford mercy.

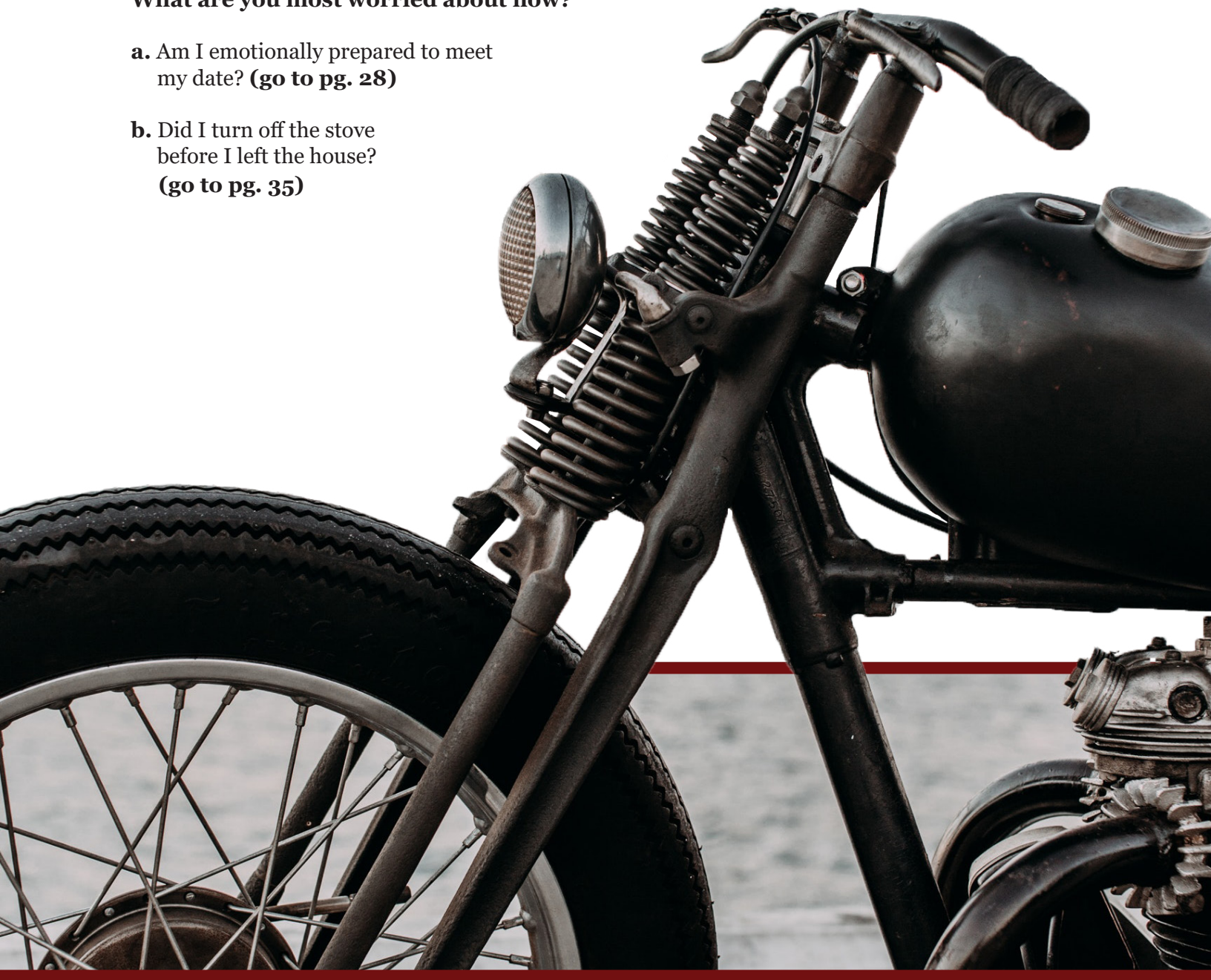
- FIN -

Interested in another date? Return to pg. 26!

As pre-arranged, you stand at the lonesome gates of the neighborhood park. Nothing contains the park’s environs to itself: wild grass overstay its welcome along the sidewalk, dandelions mutiny against concrete’s stiff hold, ivy already declaring the brick wall border as its host. The asphalt reeks of the day’s sweltering heat. A fleet of motorcycles snarl past your figure, and two pill bugs along the street’s edge scramble for the curb’s safety.

What are you most worried about now?

- a. Am I emotionally prepared to meet my date? (go to pg. 28)
- b. Did I turn off the stove before I left the house? (go to pg. 35)



A stiffness overcomes your neck. You have become unable to move. From the sky descends a hand. It’s larger than a blue whale, skin periwinkle, red-burnished stars present as moles. The giant hand moves past your vision, nudging forward a battered sedan. In its driver’s seat is another stiff-person. They sit in silence more proverbial than natural, hunched over the wheel, knuckle bone stretched against skin at all the right angles.

Pivoting behind you, the giant hand grasps your torso gently. Its nails glimmer like silver-festooned granite. A star-mole twirls in its spot. You are placed in the passenger’s seat, facing forward. The giant hand’s pressure upon your body retreats. You register none of movement’s kinetic energy, but the lines delineating the road shifts, disappearing beneath your eye’s rim.

- FIN -

Interested in another date?
Return to pg. 26!



A weight dips your head. You look up, eyes meeting not the line of store windows glistening of evening damp, but a roiling pasture of rooted laburnum. Its vine trails in reverse—cupping the opal toe of your boots, saddling stunt-limbed trees together, bowing before the starlight-vista above. Beyond the rim of your straw hat, your date motions at the tide of fletched yellow then at your hand.

You hold a sickle. You have never held a sickle in your life, nor appraised one, but you are familiar with its movement. And even if in your previous existence you have used a sickle, a willful ignorance capsizes your once predisposed knowledge. It is a knowing which supersedes your control, evading you like thunder's gallop from its cry, only evident in wake and not body.

Reaching down, you twist a head of laburnum until its stem tenses and begin the harvest.

- FIN -

Interested in another date? Return to pg. 26!

You, in fact, did not turn off the stove before you left the house. A different quandary renders this problem irrelevant. Bursting forth from the earth's bellows is your date. The chasm launches spittles of fire throughout the vicinity, tempering flames onto trees and the unfortunately parked car. Burgundy outlines of bow-bodied hounds chase the bidding of open air, only to be held back by onyx leashes. A six-headed centipede pries its head forward and uses its powerful mandibles to clear a path between you two.

There is no time to fuss and deliberate. You grab your date by the hand and flee the scene immediately. Neither of you have any expectation for your next destination, obeying the street corners which goad both of you on. Rescheduling can wait—insurance does not.

- FIN -

Interested in another date? Return to pg. 26!





The local botanical garden is sparse of a crowd. Simply put, the flora has eaten everyone up. You and your date have no fear of this. As long as you are not willing, no harm shall come, or so the sign outside says.

Among the serpentine pitcher plants and gap-toothed Venus flytraps is a glass walkway. Dirt, time, and the footsteps of many have wilted its transparent sheen to a musty brown. You both traverse this walkway—your date gestures at the sundews. Nestled in their discus leaves are a set of necro-memorabilia: a pair of half-digested sunglasses, the frayed edge of a turned-up collar, one pearling-tooth.

The walkway juts into a corner platform; you skip over the steps leading into its center. You extend a hand to your date and they accept it, following you down. Below is the manifest of a rafflesia, spiked core preened by flies, round petals fleeced in pink, stitch-like welts. Compared to its carnivorous kin, the rafflesia remains indifferent, neither acknowledging, approving, nor criticizing the carnage it has witnessed.

Deep within, you know there is an inherent wrong to this, but its colossus is one you cannot confront so easily. After a moment of chasing your dopple-shadows on the dirty glass, you and your date leave the rafflesia. It accepts your silence and all is right in the world's stink.

- FIN -

Interested in another date? Return to pg. 26!

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