

Apathy: A Love Story

(Olivia)

It's 3:12 in the morning and I'm running late. My clone, Liv, is barely going to make it out the door for this meeting. At least it's not my head that is on the line. I roll my eyes and sneak back under the covers that are still warm from my very real body heat. There's something magical about never taking off your sweats, but the same can't be said for never being able to escape a metal body that is somehow supposed to be the best representation of yourself. I've never understood clones as a coming-of-age gift for landing your first job. Sure, she is just like me, but she doesn't really understand failure. That was the reason they were invented in the first place; as a way to advance our world as the most efficient and progressive way possible. Oh hey, but they at least spared us our humanity. We still own and operate ourselves, just not in the workplace or in professional settings. Beyond our private spaces lies a land of acute, sharp, executive, and focused versions of ourselves interacting with the other clones. They call this the elementary. "*Professional Interactions made easy!*" God forbid they insult our intelligence. She finally makes it out the door. 3:18. Better make this commute short to clock in by the half hour.

(Evan)

My pocket watch broke yesterday. The screen cracked and one of the shards slipped into the center, permanently stopping one of the arms from moving. I am sitting at the ledge of an abandoned construction sight. High enough where the steam traps can't burn me. The pace of every building is faster than the last, so people are quick to leave projects unfinished.

The cityscape blinks through the manufactured clouds I'd like to think of as romantic, but these clouds are chemical by-products, metal-man-made factories. Cranking out all-in-one-single-use-disposable copper luxuries. Rejected materials pave the streets. The mass production of self-proclaimed goods will eat us all. I tongue my chipped tooth that I don't have money to fix and carefully find a pathway to get off this ledge. I look to my wrist to check the time. I wonder how long it's been 3:18.

(Olivia)

Another work week, another resemblance of our weekends. A small advantage of our real fleshed bodies is professional and social networking. This is the only way we are allowed into the elementary. Beautiful spaces, terrible food. Nice little perk is that you don't really have to feed the clones anything more than something that physically resembles food. I don't think *they* ever thought of a semi-harmonious integration between humans and their clones. Not in space, and certainly not in relationship. That's the fascinating thing about weekends at the elementary; you've got every type of person (or their non-person counterparts for that matter) flirting, mingling, and dancing. They've started to release more of "C-FORCE", short for creature force. Where they duplicate common animals like squirrels and birds into government bots as a way to keep ample survlience on the intermingling of the relationships that *they* determine to be problematic. There's been a rise of humans hooking up with their own clones. It's been a hushed

subject as to not cause attention to the fact that it's a: "homosexual act! A threat to purity! The decline of reproduction! A sinful desire for immortality!" etc. It's been the same hate propaganda for years now. Likewise, there's also advocates for these relationships. They propose that human and personal clone relationships are a helpful way explore and communicate with yourself to gear you up into having a better chance of human-to-human relationships. By their own beliefs, if you end up falling in love and in a relationship with your clone then it's no harm, no fowl. In any regard, I still refer to it as "CREEP-FORCE" because either which way it is unsettling. I really don't care to stomach my way through eating this sad clone food. Liv runs free for the next couple hours in the elementary, and I go to the 19th Cent. Station for some reading and sad coffee instead.

(Evan)

I'm on a train headed back into town. The steam keeps the cabins warm as it feeds the engine too. I think this is a flaw. Both engine and train could bust at any moment, but it saves everyone a little money that way. Low heating bills, low fare. The ride back into town is never a happy one. Victorian dresses marked with copper gadgets and charms were never my strong suit, but how could I ever disappoint the society by not being a "fair lady". The first two inches of these boots are dressed in mud, my pants eaten away by over-wear, and short hair only passing because I can cover it with a wig. It's embarrassing really. All of it. The walk around governor's square as an act of courting with the attempts at appeasing the Lorde House for knight and dameship. Apparel is used to categorize our gender and status. It's a little pathetic to see all this go on in a patio that grows more brown by each day, leaving it lifeless from the pollution. Any rejection of man might as well be considered an ungodly sin against all humanity. Their workers permit becomes suspended until they find their next date. The very fear of rejection becomes a

death sentence itself; women won't love you without a job, so you probably won't get too many opportunities for a date after that. Least to say, that there are more funerals for the unloved than for criminals. This town is feeble; selfish and in denial of the havoc of progress amongst its people. I am lucky though. I'm not busty or pretty enough to catch the eyes for courtship. I cannot be at fault for rejecting the advances of romantic martyrs. I can slip in and out of this place quietly.

The train is at my stop now and I fasten the last buttons of my cloak. Walking past the gilded copper roofs that top the trail of houses, I clench my bag feeling for my journals. My stationery is my only other saving grace. Once home, I write as if I'm leaving a detailed map into my brain. Keys and legends begin the pages of this journal that guide you through to the end. I don't know where I'm going with this, but every journal I've ever owned starts this way. Perhaps I am writing as a projection of myself. It's getting dark, I look at my watch. I forget that it's broken. It's still 3:18.

(Olivia)

Everything is digital. Physical media is available, but only as a kitschy statement. It might be kitschy, but it's still nice to hold. I get up to get a refill on coffee. I should probably pee too. These bathrooms have not been updated in years. I don't hate that about them, but they also never get attended in what seems like years too. Frustrated, I scramble trying to find extra toilet paper. Sometimes there is a false door behind the dispensers that just needs a little knocking get a new roll. As I hit what I think is the door, I feel a wadded up piece of paper too thick to be any improperly disposed toilet paper. I pull on it a bit, nearly drop it on the ground, but catch it and put it in my pocket. I get my coffee and sit for a while. I should probably catch the next train out. The Elementary bars close at 3, and I can speak for both Liv and I when I say that we are tired. The train is scheduled to arrive at 3:15. Three minutes pass before I see sight of it. As I board I

am routinely checking my pockets to make sure that my keys, wallet, and ticket are all there. I go to hand my ticket to the clone conductor but accidentally also hand them the paper I found in the bathroom. I had forgotten that I shoved it in there.

“Sorry about that” I say and take a seat in a middle cabin.

There is mud trailed everywhere which seems odd to me because the city has been exceptional at keeping its grounds free of any trash. I shrug it off and try to stay awake, so that I don’t miss my stop. I’m pulling out the piece of paper I had nearly dropped twice when I see someone exiting at this stop dressed in what seems to be victorian garb. They are not wearing a dress per say, but their pants jingle and clink with buttons made of pressure gauges and boots that facet with gears. I am completely unnoticed by them as I more or less gawk as they leave. “Was this one of the Elementary's themed weekends?” I think out loud.

I’m looking down now, the paper reads “*This is why i’m fucked*” it includes a flowchart.

(Evan)

I woke up late today, but it doesn’t matter because I am not called to do anything but escape into my dreary, abandoned steam world. It’s friday night, and that means it’s paycheck day in the city. Post work clubs fill with working men to pay their leisure penance. This all goes into a lottery that gets distributed among a select few at the end of the year. This money is often used to fund weddings, trips, or as down payment for a house. It’s reserved for couples. Count me out. The girls swoon in desperation about of their potential beloved paying their duty at the social club homage, while the “gents” retell elaborate and grandiose stories of their lust for courting or their courting for lust. The motives for courting have become a little grey, but it’s

still based in the name of virtuous and moral love. Anywho, the more you embody some version of a sad poetic tragedy the higher your chances are towards the lottery. The true tragedy is a blind eye having these men and women convince themselves that this is true love if you ask me. Again, I am spared by my general lack of interest. Tragic, I know.

This is not to say that I don't get lonely. There's only so far you can go with what my friends call a "vivid imagination". Vivid is not as accurate as necessary. My journal is pressed with ink describing all the ways I *could* love. And I won't lie, the elaborate dresses? They're somewhat flattering. Not on me, of course not, but perhaps the dames are looking for the wrong knight. My poetic tragedy is being lost in a lust that can only exist on paper. Anyways, It's too early to drown in carnal desires on a cold train ride into steam city. Frustrated, I write, "This is why I'm fucked" as the title of this journal entry. I shove my journal back into my bag and hope that this train ends up failing on its mechanics. Partially because I'm cold, partially because i'm over it.

A couple hours later....

I'm perched on my favorite ledge. Counting all little people pace around in monotony. It's uniform enough to make it disinteresting, but every now and then there's a slip up. Potential incident reports due to lack of sleep or big egos. Choose one.

At a distance I see someone wandering around. They look lost and too clean. Their garb doesn't have that familiar shade of "soot brown". I'm too curious to not go and investigate.

(Olivia)

There has more or less been an incident. I've lost the tracking on Liv. It's not that I'm concerned for her, but losing your clone blacklists you as "irresponsible for the workforce". It often leaves you with jobs you hate and rids you of any access to decent living. I decide to go

into the Elementary. Ill advised on a weekday, but I need to risk it. The good thing is i'm identical to my clone, the unfortunate part is that if someone tries to talk to me they'll know i'm not her. As I arrive into Elementary I am hit with a technological buzz that is quickly starting to give me a headache. Another sign that tells me I should probably leave. I'm wandering the streets hopelessly looking for Liv, and I need to find her quick because the Elementary unplugs at 3:30. I don't really know what happens after that. Maybe it glitches out, maybe the city goes into sleep mode.

The city blocks ahead of me look just like the last. Didn't I just see that sign? I'm more anxious than not, and assume the my repetitive sight is just because I am hoping that it was human error that I overlooked Liv. I walk a couple more blocks and realize that my anxieties have been confirmed. I've only got 12 minutes left until 3:30 when I realize that I've been trailing a simulated loop for the last 18 minutes. "Fuck.", I think. Someone knows i'm not supposed to be here. I look back and the sidewalks are that were paved in concrete are not collapsing into a binary code. 00001000101110. What? I'm not sure what is happening and the more I pace the more I make a trail of zeros and ones. I'm starting to panic. Elementary has never looked like this, they've never described it this way, and I'm realizing that I really shouldn't be here. I keep looking for Liv now hurried, in hopes that maybe if I find her the Elementary will reset. No luck. Each step is fading in front of me. I feel cold and dizzy. My view is hazed and this world is glitching out. The sky is turning whirlpooling, the code is getting stronger, this buzz is getting more intense. I crouch down because I'm having trouble concentrating; rambling mindless prayers to keep me safe.

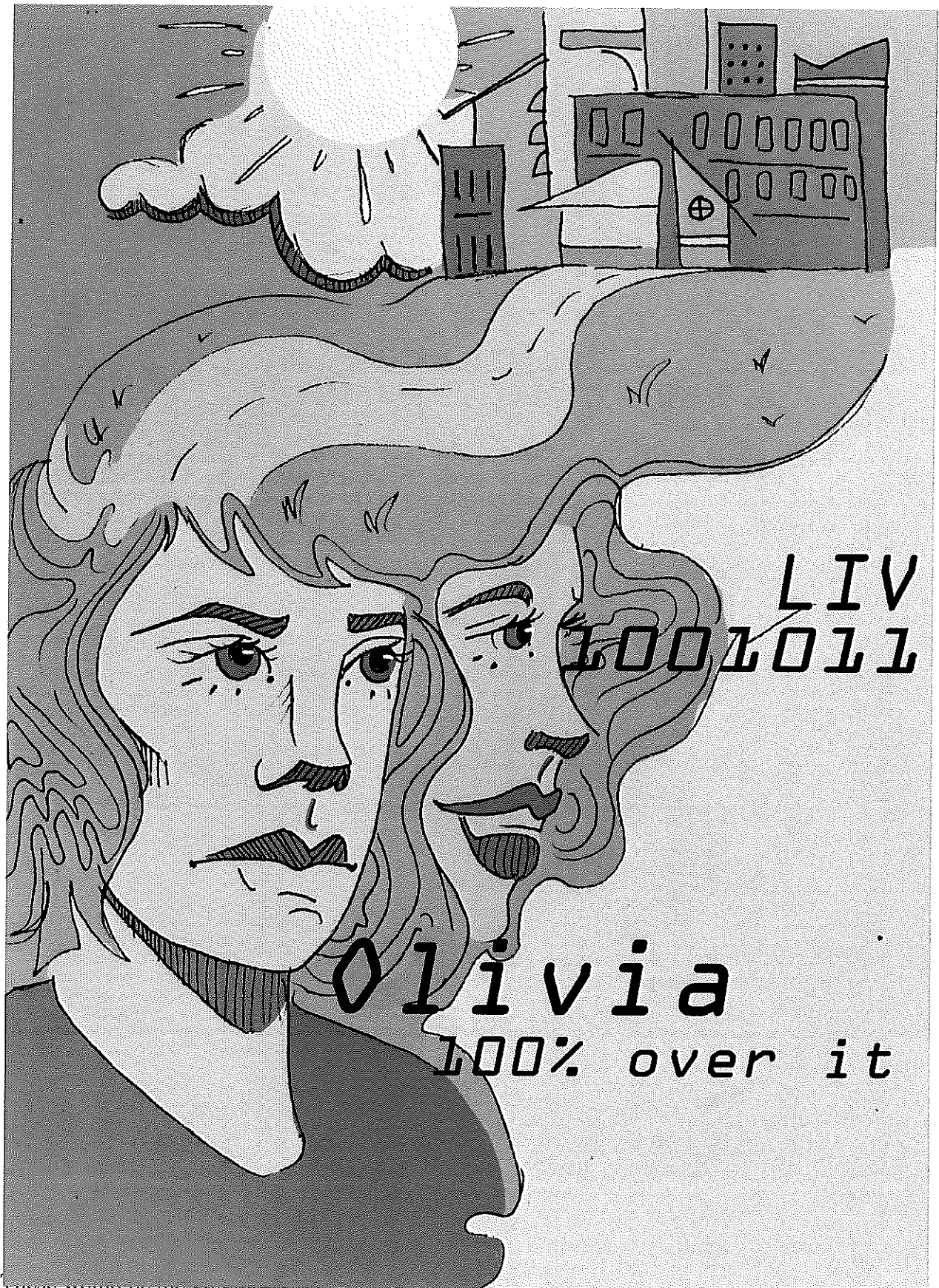
Silence.

I open my eyes after a few moments; this is no longer a minor glitch. The world ahead of me is the color of spilled coffee on paper. The people around me are mindless, and no one is watching

me. Panic level: 1000. I don't even know how to ask for help right now. It seems that I am completely unnoticed-I wonder if anyone can see me because effortlessly file around me like a traffic circle. I hear a quick thud and look down. Someone has dropped their bag and with it a bunch of loose leaf papers. My first instinct would be to help, but my brain is so spun out from this cluster that I rush to pick one up in hopes of finding any clues that can tell me where I am instead.

(Evan)

My pace is hurried. Who is this girl? What is she looking for? The streets are littered with pollution; both people and dirt. Squeezing past every shoulder I realize that my "excuse me's" are good for nothing. I catch sight. She's wearing plain black pants and a knit sweater. I wonder if she can see me. I wonder if she can see anything because by the looks of it, everything in front of her is just as scrambled as the look on her face. I am so close. I push through this crowd. Finally in front I feel the strap of my bag break. "Fuck." My journals and loose paper scraps fly everywhere nearly landing at her feet. She bends down and grabs a note. I'm right in front of her now. As she begins to stand she notices me. Her eyes are piercing. Her lips are tight and she looks scared. Me too. My mouth is parting trying to piece together any sound that could resemble words. It just comes out as an exhale. I reach for the paper and graze her hand. I notice her watch. It's made of glass, but absent of any mechanics. No arms or dials-just a shiny gloss screen that displays nothing else but the time; 3:18. Staggered, I reach for the watch on her wrist. A sharp buzz shocks me and I quickly retract. I look back up to see if she noticed, and just as quickly as my heart was racing she was gone.



These would be the graphic novel covers for Olivia and Liv's stories.

EVAN

hates their life

