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by vl

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CONTENT WARNINGS:

explicit language

suicidality

dissociation

reckless driving

about the “A” in the acronym LGBTQ^IAP₂S⁺

the A itself is (arguably) an acronym; it means all this:

- aromantic (i.e., aro)
- asexual (i.e., ace)
- aroace
- androgynous
- agender
- ally

this book is for the As.

the premise...

take me with you

I see it flashing by me—
roofless, doorless Wrangler,
empty passenger seat,
brooding-auraed stranger
in the fugue of a road-rager—
such a ruinous kind of danger,
it beckons me!
what if I went along?
I reckon we
would come to get along.

that's the one thought in my head
when the green light turns to yellow.
Wrangler's brake lights flicker red,
and I want to, got to bellow:
“take
 me
 with
 you!”

I see it sitting so still—
too easy to climb in.
I keep thinking, I will!
who would call it crime
if we're both having a good time?
they say, if life gives you a lime,
make limeade, right?
one thing I never do.
it's Friday night...
I'm thinking something new!

and it swirls around my mind
as the yellow light flares red...
tires skid across their line,
then, like that, it ends up said!
“take
 me
 with
 you!”

there's no taking it back,
there's no clicking undo...
there's no cleaning the slate,
there's just following through...

I'm jogging towards you!

just your jaw going slack
and your eyebrows, askew...

what you're meaning to say,

I'm just wishing I knew.

I'm whisp'ring anew:

"take

me

with

you!"

[Emma]

Now Playing... “Friday I’m in Love” by The Cure

SCENE: Emma in “work” clothes, in a café, sitting at the counter by the window, surrounded by couples—one of which is kissing... blech.

Lyrics she thinks:

ace?

he’s flying by,
distance-runner sprinting.
I’m mesmerized...
innocently grinning.

all I’ve spied is his stride,
so *smooth*...

ooh-ooh, he’s cut,
so chiseled, he sizzles the drizzly air.
my eyes blink shut—
his presence is not messing with me anywhere...

still a pleasure he’s there
‘cause he’s gorgeous, I swear!

she’s hustling, just
runway-model strutting.
I’m wonderstruck...
unwittingly ducking.

now, my view’s of her shoes,
so fly...

my, my, she’s lush,
so perfectly curvy, she’s turning heads.
feel my cheeks flush—
her presence is just messing with my confidence...

in a second, I’m *crushed*.
one thing I know: this ain’t a crush...

nuh-uh, no way!
I won’t say that I’m gay—

I couldn't be!
all right, *maybe*...
different than straight
with a parallel fate—
it's plaguing me:
my pronoun's *she*,
still, I'm not one to chase!
am I ace?

new must-read book:
some one meets some other.
I just can't look
once they're under covers...

touching—*naked*—scene is making
me sick...

that's it! I'm done!
with novels—poems—Broadway—shows—movies—songs, too!
how folks write love!
it's all flirty, then it's dirty, a wet dream come true!

but it's perfect for you!
WHY? I only wish I knew!

nuh-uh, no way!
I won't say that I'm gay—
I couldn't be!
all right, *maybe*...
different than straight
with a parallel fate—
it's plaguing me:
my pronoun's *she*,
still, I'm not one to chase!
am I ace?

intrigued,	
	yet disgusted by
what you mean	when you say <i>lovin'</i>
	(isn't anyone else?),
PG	
	is as much as I
can take—	from worse, I'm runnin'...
	(from everyone else!)

nuh-uh, no way!
I won't say that I'm gay—
I couldn't be!
all right, *maybe*...
different than straight
with a parallel fate—
it's plaguing me:
my pronoun's *she*,
still, I'm not one to chase!
am I ace?

nuh-uh, no way!
but the fact's I can't say—
I don't view me
as L, B, or T.
different than straight,
with a parallel fate—
I'd love to be
with somebody...
still, I'm not one to chase.
am I ace?

Now Playing... “Closing Time” by Semisonic

[Xavi]

Now Playing... “Pressure” by MUSE

SCENE: Xavi in sweat clothes, in the gloom of an unlit room, all sprawled across the couch.

In the hallway, just outside the dressing room...

YERAY (XYZ’s bassist): Okay, it’s time. He told us half an hour. Quote: “Walk Amory. Give me half an hour.” We gave him that.

ZARA (XYZ’s drummer): As if 30 minutes were enough...

AMORY (XYZ’s mascot and Xavi’s service dog): Woof!

ZARA: *Hush.*

YERAY: Think he’s awake?

Silence.

ZARA: Not yet.

AMORY: Woof-woof!

ZARA: *Amory. Inside voice.*

YERAY: Think we should wake him?

ZARA: Not really. But, like you said, it’s time... Better we wake him than Alf.

AMORY: Woof-woof.

ZARA: *And better you than us, Amory...*

YERAY: Well... less so today than usual.

Silence.

YERAY: What do we do, Zara? All he does is push us away! All we want to do is help!

ZARA: Keep coming back?

AMORY: *(scratching the door and whining)*

ZARA: *He knows we’re here, Amory... He’ll open up when he feels ready.*

YERAY: Yeah.

Silence.

ALF (boss man of the band): *(from a long way down the hall)* Xavier?

YERAY: Uh-oh.

AMORY: Grrr.

ZARA: *Hey. No growling at Alf.*

YERAY: At least not to his face...

ZARA: Yeray!

AMORY: Grrr.

YERAY: She knows what’s good.

ALF: *(from a short way down the hall)* Where the hell is Xavier?

ZARA: He’s coming, Alf.

YERAY: *(knock-knock-knock)* Xavi?

ZARA: He'll be ready any second; he knows it's time.

YERAY: (*knock-knock-knock*) You, uh, kind of need to open up now.

ZARA: Been on schedule all day.

YERAY: (*knock-knock-knock*) Xavi?

ZARA: No worries, Alf.

ALF: (*now close enough to smell through the door*) Then why don't I have your set list IN HAND?

Silence.

ALF: It's not done, is it.

YERAY: It's...

ZARA: Close?

YERAY: Ish?

ALF: Might as well not exist?

Silence.

ALF: Yeray. Zara. You've got 7 songs on the charts this month. 4 Top 40 hits. You understand what that kind of attention wins, don't you? A following. Fans enough to fill a stadium with *twice* the capacity of Fenway. Fans enough to plan a world tour. *Demand*. A precious thing in business. A precarious thing. You want a career in music, you make damn sure he plays the hits your fans are paying to experience on stage. He's expected to rehearse those tonight and perform those tomorrow; I need a fucking set list that says he intends to do so!

Silence.

ALF: And I need it now.

YERAY: Understood.

ZARA: We'll get you one soon.

YERAY: Promise.

ALF: Be on stage in 2.

Alf's pounding footsteps, receding...

Lyrics Xavi thinks:

listless

pitter-

patter

of

a

drizzle

hitting

up
against
the
window,
waning
light
a
little
grizzled
from
the
vantage
of my
pillow

couch is
singing
a siren's
song

head is
thinking,
I'm *right* where
I belong.

still, I'm both'ring to wake
because *you* press!
just my whole life at stake;
I can't care less—
I'm actually that *listless*...

sloshy
whoosh
of
passing
traffic
clock
is
ticking
—
just *you* panic!
I'm
unmoving
and
impassive
...
few

days
prior,
I
was manic /:

stage is
singing,
show must
go on!

head is
thinking,
I just
wish I were... *gone*.

still, I'll bother to play
because *you* press!
might not sound quite the same;
I can't care less—
I'm actually that *listless*...

spiraling
depression
I tend to
lie awake—
all night...

sometimes pacing, sometimes racing
to escape from my mind's blight...

to turn, I take
a left in
my quest to
come to make
a right...

still, I'm falling; still, I'm calling,
“nothing's wrong!” to *your* delight!

and I bother to try
because *you* press!
rule is do or do not;
I can't care less—
I'm actually that *listless*...

what a mess!

I've never been as *listless*.

Now Playing... “Otherwise” by Jake Scott

[Emma]

Now Playing... “Love Me Tender” by Elvis Presley

SCENE: Emma in running clothes, chasing the Charles.

Lyrics she thinks:

the river & I

I pace the cities—days and nights—
to put miles between myself and *me*.
I run the yellow and red lights;
can’t take pause or break my stride to break us free.

I pace the cities all alone—
I’m not lonely, I can only pretend
while I watch people watch me roam
by the river I consider my best friend...

he’s there to help me smile—
mile after mile.

the way he dances with the light,
each wind gust, the geese and ducks, the hues of earth and sky,
and boats—boats of every type!
he’s so lovely, but can’t love me tender in reply.

I pace the footpaths on and on;
all my repressed depressed thoughts tag along.
I move this fast to get them gone,
and, repeatedly, I breathe out, “nothing’s wrong.”

the river says I’m right
night after night.

the way he dances with the lights
of bikes and cars—apartments—lightning rods so high—
and airplanes starting out their flights...
he’s so lovely, but can’t love me tender in reply.

and, still, his spell’s one I
never can defy!

at the end of the day,
I run straight to the river.
when I'm less than okay,
if I'm chasing the river,
I feel close to fine.

at the start of the night,
I run right by the river.
when the dark hits my mind,
if I'm tight to the river,
I still see his shine...

here, now, he's smiling up at me,
but *this* is all that we can ever be.

'cause he just dances with the light,
each wind gust, the geese and ducks, the hues of earth and sky,
and boats—boats of every type!
not I...

'cause he got landed with the lights
of bikes and cars—apartments—lightning rods so high—
and airplanes starting out their flights...
so I...

oh, I'll never catch his eye!
he's so lovely, but can't love me tender in reply.

(musing while running)

question(s)

what's the point of dating?

(please do not say "sex." if that's it, then I see no point.)

what makes a date (not involving sex) different than hanging out with a friend?

what kinds of things do "couples" do (excluding sex) together that friends don't?

what kinds of things do "couples" talk about that friends don't?

(do friends talk about sex?)

just curious...

(now verging on runners' high)

slow... time

just like the sky and ocean,
I chase the high of motion
in constant change—places strange—
cityscape commotion!

I can't sit still—
I can't sit still—
there's no way if there's
no will...

I don't wanna grow up;
I don't wanna grow old.
seems the higher you're up,
the faster things unfold—
I don't
mind slow
time, so
I'm flying low.

the breeze-swept river flowing...
the drizzle's ripples growing...
when I run with no one,
wish I'd come for rowing!

I push the pace—
I push the pace—
don't care who you are,
let's race!

I don't wanna grow up;
I don't wanna grow old.
seems the higher you're up,
the faster things unfold—
I don't
mind slow
time, so
I'm flying low.

below all the clouds,
far apart from the crowds,

‘midst blossoming boughs
and bushes...

I push through the wind
that whooshes...

past boats in their yard,
‘cross the lily pad garden,
through rain—pouring hard
in snatches—

I splash through the muddy
patches!

I don’t care ‘bout the mess—
‘cause who’s there to impress?
and to where am I destined
but home—

all alone—
after I roam?

‘cause I have no date
‘cause I have no mate
‘cause my doom’s to bloom
too late...

I don’t wanna grow up;
I don’t wanna grow old.
seems the higher you’re up,
the faster things unfold—
I don’t
mind slow
time, so
I’m flying low.

Now Playing... “The Prophecy” by Taylor Swift

[Xavi]

Now Playing... “The Show Must Go On” by Queen

SCENE: The band taking the stage inside an empty theatre; Xavi hangs behind.

Lyrics he thinks:

not ready, but here I come...

late day, take two,
the stage awaits; little crowd does, too.

give me just a sec to find my head.

not quite all wrong, not quite all right,
still not ready to face the light.

I may look a wreck, but I'm not dead...

so, here I come... here I come...
here I come.

I'm not ready, I told you so!
I'm not ready, but, still, I'll go
on with the show...
'cause I won't let you down, you know!

shaking hands, shaking voice,
craving a place to escape the noise.

give me just a sec to pause—reset.

okay, it's time, I'll fall in line,
muster the stuff it takes to shine.

much as I can give is what you'll get.

so, here I come... here I come...
here I come.

I'm not ready, I told you so!
I'm not ready, but, still, I'll go

on with the show...
'cause I won't let you down, you know!

here I come... here I come...
here I come.

not ready...

but here I come... here I come...
here I come.

unsteady.

but here I come... here I come...
here I come.

I'm not ready, I told you so!
I'm not ready, but, still, I'll go
on with the show...
'cause I won't let you down, you know!

the second Xavi appears on stage...

ALF: You.

XAVI: Hm?

ALF: Set list. Now.

XAVI: Mm.

ALF: Now, Xavier! Right fucking now!

XAVI: (*turns out his pockets, one by one, showing all are empty*)

ALF: For the ten millionth time this week!

XAVI: Not ready now.

YERAY: Not that we'll need it.

ZARA: We really only improvise it every gig.

ALF: *Not ready?* Xavier. Yeray. Zara. You're 24 hours from facing a sold-out Fenway Park! 37,000 fans! 37,000! *Not ready* isn't an option!

ZARA: We're ready for rehearsal now, aren't we?

YERAY: Hundred percent.

XAVI: Ish.

ALF: All right; then, prove it!

XAVI: (*flinches*)

ALF: You think you can wing it tomorrow, you prove you can wing it tonight!

XAVI: Deal.

ALF: Perform the Fenway set! Start to finish to encore!

XAVI: We'll do that.

ALF: Hit every hit!

Beat.

ZARA: I'll start us off, shall I?

YERAY: Yes!

XAVI: Please.

YERAY: Love this one!

XAVI: Same.

YERAY: Next album, Alf! First single!

ALF: Humph.

YERAY: This'll go viral!

XAVI: Here, at least.

YERAY: This'll top the charts!

XAVI: X.

YERAY: Y!

ZARA: 1, 2, 3!

Lyrics Zara sings:

you be starboard, I'll be port

ain't a lie: you've got a smile
that leaves me smiling...
you wave, it makes my whole day,
just like a silver lining!
girl, for sure, you've got a story
that mesmerizes...
you speak, I hang on every word;
they're all full of surprises!

you're so tall, I'll keep it short:
you be starboard, I'll be port,
we'll be a pair...
I just want to row, I swear!

can't say that I care
for cleaning up and dressing up
and going out.
I'd rather just go where
calloused hands and spandex pants
get bragged about
while working out 'cause working out
is working out to bring together us
two...
I just want to row with you.

ain't a fib: you've got a split
that leaves me gaping...
I pull as hard as ever now,
we're flying when we're racing!
end of row, you've got a glow
that's so breathtaking,
I blush and make a goofy face;
inside, my heart is breaking!

you're so fast, I'll blurt it now:
I'll be stroke; if you'll be bow,
we'll be a pair...
I just want to row, I swear!

can't say that I care
for cleaning up and dressing up
and going out.
I'd rather just go where
calloused hands and spandex pants
get bragged about
while working out 'cause working out
is working out to bring together us

two...

I just want to row with you.

I'll set the rate, you set the course,

we'll set the boat.

I'll pull my weight, and we'll go straight
until we vote to let it run...

and while we float 'neath rising sun,

I'll turn your way.

we'll share a grin and bump our fists—

I'll wish to say you are my *one*...

can't say that I care

for cleaning up and dressing up

and going out.

I'd rather just go where

calloused hands and spandex pants

get bragged about

while working out 'cause working out

is working out to bring together us

two...

I just want to row with you.

ALF: That's not going on an album of yours.
XAVI & YERAY & ZARA: What?
ALF: And that's not going on stage in Fenway Park!
XAVI & YERAY & ZARA: Oh, come on!
ALF: So stop insulting my ears and start rehearsing the hits!

Lyrics Xavi sings:

unravelling

well, isn't this right where you want me?
wasn't I right on time?
you freak like it's wrong 'til you've got me
worried that *I'm* the crime!

I'm the crime! *I'm* the crime!
out of all chords! out of all rhymes!

without a breath to spare!
all I can give is what you get...
nothing is left to share!
but have I quit? not yet...

well, isn't this quite as expected—
didn't you mind the signs?
you bellow at me to correct it,
as though it's *my* design!

my design! *my* design!
to be my farthest from just fine!

without a breath to spare!
all I can give is what you get...
nothing is left to share!
but have I quit? not yet...

you pull me and pull me,
I—tear—at—my—seams—
some more,
like fabric—unravelling—
while everyone screams
to score...
a fragment of ragged

me

what is it for?
what'll I be

without a breath to spare?
all I can give is what you get...
nothing is left to share,
but have I quit? not yet...
I'm out of breath to spare!
all I could give is what you've got...
nothing is left to share!
I'm shot...

ALF: Take 5. All of you.

XAVI: *(bolts off stage)*

AMORY: *(sprints across the stage, chasing Xavi off)*

YERAY: Zara?

ZARA: Yeah?

YERAY: Did... we ever put the roof and all back on the Jeep?

ZARA: Why?

YERAY: 'Cause he's the one with the key...

ZARA: *(bolts off stage)* Xavi!

YERAY: *(joins the chase)* Xavi, wait!

ALF: And then there were none.

Now Playing... "Liquid State" by MUSE

[Emma]

SCENE: Emma in sopping wet running clothes, waiting to cross an intersection.

Lyrics she thinks:

soggy-shoed

the traffic sloshes by,
a blurry swath of lights...
the walk signs all deny
to cross the way's all right...

I wait...
my soggy sneakers grate...

a couple then... *appears*,
a double rainbow's peers...
aglow in their own sphere
from ankles up to ears...

they wait...
too lovely to narrate...

1 umbrella
2 gazes glued
3 words felt there
I'm soggy-shoed :/

they're rain-imbued,
yet unsubdued...

I watch them share a grin
while re-ensnaring fingers...
the space between them thins
'til half a hair's width... lingers...

I stare...
too awed by them to care...

I watch them flush all red
while brushing lips together...

the space around them sheds
a glow that rips my breath...

away,
to lovely to portray...

1 umbrella
2 faces glued
3 words felt there
I'm soggy-shoed :/

they're rain-imbued,
yet unsubdued...

for a moment, they're so locked
in each other's kiss...
even though they're soggy-socked,
all they two know is bliss...

suddenly, I'm wonderstruck:
what is love but this?
how'd they come upon such luck
to meet instead of miss?

1 umbrella
2 heart-mates glued
3 words felt there
I'm soggy-shoed :/

[Xavi]

SCENE: Xavi in sopping wet sweat clothes, driving Jeep Wrangler too fast.

Lyrics he thinks:

where do I go now?

hard to remember how to *breathe*
when a wave's over me,
and all I'm thinking is the sea's
'bout to break over me!

and all I'm seeing in my head
is that WEIGHT crashing down...
I feel the crush, I hear a *crunch*,
I taste the flood—then I drown...

and I forget that I'm alive
until I take a breath,
and I forget why to survive
until I'm facing death...
and then I wake up from the daze—
where am I? where am I?
just misty murk returns my gaze—
where do I go now?

hard to remember how to s l o w
when the current's so *fast*,
and, still, I'm told, "go with the flow."
'spite the undertow's blast...

and, still, I'm struggling to swim—
can't tell upward from down!
I feel the rush, I hear the gush,
I taste the flood—then I drown...

and I forget that I'm alive
until I take a breath,
and I forget why to survive
until I'm facing death...
and then I wake up from the daze—
where am I? where am I?
just misty murk returns my gaze—
where do I go now?

at last, I come to taste the fumes
of a drenched city lane.
at last, I come to hear the *vroom*
of the engine I strain.

at last, I come to feel the wheel
in these quivering fists...
at last, I know the view is *real*;
that breeze-swept river there exists...

for now, I'm here; for now, I'll drive
until I sight a red.
don't really care where I arrive—
just that there's light ahead.
for now, I'm here; for now, I'll drive
until I'm out of gas.
don't really care where I arrive—
just that these hours pass...

[Emma]

SCENE: Emma lingering at intersection, too miserable to move.

Lyrics she thinks:

a breath into the atmosphere

rain.
wind-tousled sheets now flooding streets
and weighing me
down.
too wet to trudge, I never budge;
I wait... and wait...
around,
just gazing at this ground...

rain.
I can't escape its pound.

it's in times like these,
if I find my knees,
I'll wish to disappear—
a breath into the atmosphere.

rain
just puddling here; cars trundling near,
too late, I jerk—
SPLASH!
now drenched all through, I'm trembling, too,
just waiting... waiting...
abashed,
all faith in myself... *dashed...*

rain.
I can't escape its lash.

it's in times like these,
if I find my knees,
I'll wish to disappear—
a breath into the atmosphere.

'cause I don't
want to go at it alone

forevermore
'cause I don't
see a purpose with no person
to adore...
there to phone
when I can't take no more.

drive me home
when early-spring rains pour.

it's in times like these,
if I find my knees,
I'll wish to disappear—
a breath into the atmosphere.

I see it flashing by me—
roofless, doorless Wrangler,
empty passenger seat,
brooding-auraed stranger
in the fugue of a road-rager—
such a ruinous kind of danger,
it beckons me!
what if I went along?
I reckon we
would come to get along.

that's the one thought in my head
when the green light turns to yellow.
Wrangler's brake lights flicker red,
and I want to, got to bellow:
"take
 me
 with
 you!"

I see it sitting so still—
too easy to climb in.
I keep thinking, I will!
who would call it crime
if we're both having a good time?
they say, if life gives you a lime,
make limeade, right?
one thing I never do.
it's Friday night...
I'm thinking something new!

and it swirls around my mind
as the yellow light flares red...
tires skid across their line,
then, like that, it ends up said!
"take
 me
 with
 you!"

there's no taking it back,
there's no clicking undo...
there's no cleaning the slate,

there's just following through...
I'm jogging towards you!
just your jaw going slack
and your eyebrows, askew...
what you're meaning to say,
I'm just wishing I knew.
I'm whisp'ring anew:
"take
 me
 with
 you!"

I've got your widened eyes on me,
you've got mine on you.
for half a beat then, we both see
what each other means to do.

your move, you don't move,
so I leap in next to you.
your move, you don't move,
though the green light gives the cue.

now, everyone else reproves you,
but nothing they do removes you!

if I were you, I'd blame it on
your unbidden guest.
you've every right to yell, "get gone!"
and then threaten my arrest.

your move, you don't move,
so I buckle myself in...
your move, you don't move,
though the green light says, "begin!"

now, patience is wearing *thin*.
still, nothing's to your chagrin!

so it seems to me
as you breathe in, out.
so it seems to be
'til we're *peeling out*...

[Xavi]

SCENE: Xavi driving dangerously fast through unrelenting rain.

Lyrics he thinks:

roll bars

grip at 10, 2,
gaze on my lane.
though I sense you,
I still try (in vain!)
to forget...

then it's clutch, stick,
pedal toward the metal.
I feel gut sick—
letting you unsettle
me yet...

got me breaking a sweat.

truth be said,
one half my head is
wishing you had left me
to break down in peace!
ignore all the pieces!
just the same,
one half my brain is
hoping you will stay 'til
the rain comes to cease,
then sort every piece of *me*
you see.

grip at 10, 2,
tears blurring sight,
I pretend to
be quite all right
to steer...

then it's clutch, stick,
pedal; gears click.
I blink once—*SHIT!*
reddish glows aflicker,
I veer—

street's so *slick*, we career!

truth be said,
one half my head is
wishing you had left me
to crash out in peace!
ignore all the pieces!
just the same,
one half my brain is
hoping you will stay 'til
the rain comes to cease,
then sort every piece of *me*
you see.

grip at 10, 2—
wheel and skin fused—
all I can do—
reeling—bemused—
in hell—

'cause I sense you
scrambling for a handhold—
all you can do—
damned 'cause we both gambled
ourselves!

all is well that ends well.

*don't want to test the roll bars
or come to wreck the whole car!
I'm taking back control now;
I'll save you, that's my sole vow!
don't want to test the roll bars
or come to wreck the whole car!
I'm taking back control now;
I'll save you, that's my sole vow!
don't want to test the roll bars
or come to wreck the whole car!
I'm taking back control now;
I'll save you; that's my sole vow!*

[Emma]

SCENE: Jeep pulled over, unscathed; rain pouring; Xavi sobbing; Emma beside him, hugging herself tightly.

Lyrics she thinks:

awkward silence

still don't really know where
my gaze should go (it's true!).
if I meet your eye, then
my presence might intrude—

wish you knew that I would
rather it soothe.

I don't even know how
to say, "hello!" to you.
so, why even try it?
won't come out right—just rude!

wish you knew that I have
never been smooth.

what've I done?!?
what do I *do* now?
what've I done?!?
what do I *do* now?
what've I done?!?
I'm in it with you—how
will we get through?
the night is still new!
what do I *do*?
I wish I knew...

I don't really know of
a way to show I'm here...
if I meet your eye, then,
perhaps, it might be clear:

I'm not being shy, no,
I'm just all ears...

I don't even know how

to say, “hello!” I fear.
I won’t say, “goodbye!” ‘til
you do outrightly, dear—

I’ll sit by your side ‘til
you’re out of tears...

can you just say—
what do I *do* now?
other than stay,
what do I *do* now?
clear as day,
I’m in it with you—how
will we get through?
the night is still new!
what do I *do*?
I wish I knew...

awkward silence,
all my thoughts run wild!
tornadic violence
whips all through my head!
awkward silence
carries on awhile!
tornadic violence
rips my sense to shreds!

no wonder my tongue is
lead!

what’re the rules?
what do I *do* now?
none of my schools
gave me a clue how
to wield the tools
to fix up you—now,
what do I *do*?
we’ve *got* to get through!
what do I *do*?
I wish I knew...

[Xavi]

SCENE: Jeep pulled over, idling; rain falling; Xavi lifts his tear-stained face and cuts the engine and slumps back.

EMMA: I can leave, if—

XAVI: (*hoarsely*) Don't.

EMMA: Okay. I'll just... stay.

XAVI: Thanks.

Silence.

EMMA: I'm sorry. For being so awkward. And quiet. I'm quite the listener, if you're a talker...

Silence.

EMMA: Anyway, I'll just be here... listening... until you want me gone...

Silence.

XAVI: I'm glad you got in when you did.

EMMA: Why's that?

XAVI: Think I woulda let it roll if I'd still been alone.

EMMA: Gotcha.

Lyrics he thinks:

beautiful stranger

I don't know your name...
haven't seen your face twice.
yeah, we're both to blame...
'cause this silence tastes nice.

but to let it be
has a price.

all I know for sure:
come the morn, I'll regret
never knowing more
than just your silhouette.

but when our eyes meet
as they haven't yet...

beautiful stranger,
what will you see
when you look at me?
who will I *be* to you?

will you guess my name
once you've seen my face... *anew*?
will you let the fame
and the rumors *t a i n t* your view?

will you meet the mask
or break it through?

all I know for sure:
come the morn, I'll regret
never showing more
than just your Internet.

but when our eyes meet
as they haven't yet...

beautiful stranger,
what will you see
when you look at me?
who will I *be* to you?

[Emma]

SCENE: Jeep parked; rain falling; Emma fidgeting.

EMMA: (*a whisper*) I'm sorry. For needing to bother you. But what are the rules on eating in your car?

XAVI: ...

EMMA: 'Cause I have a protein bar with me, 'cause I ran something like 5 miles to that intersection, and I'm hitting the point of starting to want a snack?

XAVI: I don't mind if you eat.

EMMA: That's not against the rules?

XAVI: Not when I'm wearing sweats... and definitely not when it's raining *inside* the car.

EMMA: You're... sure?

XAVI: I don't mind if you eat.

EMMA: Want half? It's chocolate and peanut butter.

XAVI: ...

EMMA: (*fully taking in Xavi's face*) Oh, my—

Lyrics she thinks:

too good to be true...

strange,
a kind of déjà vu,
each pang
of ain't-no-way-*he's-you*!

it's *too*
good to be true!
but two
can't look more twin...
it's *too*
good to be true!
but you
have his famed grin...

fazed—
ashamedly starstruck!
too dazed
to claim it's just my luck!

it's *too*
good to be true!

but two
can't look more twin...
it's *too*
good to be true!
but you
have his famed grin...

see, the truth's I've seen the album art—
the magazines in supermarkets—
the search results—the Billboard chart—
the YouTube posts the dude's costarred in!
I know each word—I know each note—
though it's absurd to think, who wrote it?
and see the face up in my mind,
then eye your face and come to find that
they match...
I wish the thought would detach...
it latches...
next instant, my breath catches!

it's *too*
good to be true!
but two
can't look more twin...
it's *too*
good to be true!
but you
have his famed grin...

[Xavi]

SCENE: Jeep parked; rain slowing to drizzle; Xavi sniffing, tears trickling...

XAVI: So, you're... a runner?

EMMA: Oh. Um. *Rower*. Who runs.

XAVI: Rower? Like, blisters and blazers and regattas and stuff?

EMMA: Yes.

XAVI: That's wicked cool. My band's drummer rows. I've heard stories from her. Tried erging with her. Liked erging. Can't do water, though.

EMMA: Why's that?

XAVI: Can't swim.

EMMA: Oh.

XAVI: I dance. I'm a dancer.

EMMA: Which, um, style?

XAVI: Tap. Hip-hop. Modern. Whichever matches my mood...

EMMA: Cool.

XAVI: I'm... I'm Xavi, by the way.

EMMA: Emma.

XAVI: Pleased to meet you, Emma.

EMMA: Oh. I guess I'm... nervous... to meet you. *Xavi*.

XAVI: So, then, I guess you've heard of XYZ...

EMMA: Yes.

XAVI: You a fan?

EMMA: Yes. But just the kind who buys the CDs. (*panicking*) I'm NOT a stan, I promise; I didn't know you were *you* when I climbed in!

XAVI: I kinda—

EMMA: And I can't use social media 'cause of where I work! I won't take any pictures or ask for an autograph! I'll just sit here and listen 'til whenever—like I said!

XAVI: Thank you. Emma.

Lyrics he thinks:

what if I open up?

you keep telling me you'll listen;
what's it that you want to hear?
'cause the truth
ain't a thing I share for fear.

what if I open up?
not clear...

I keep sitting in this silence,

wishing it would *disappear*...
just the truth
clambers toward my mouth's frontier.

what if I open up?
not clear...

look my way, and it's all I see:
you're seeing tears
through the rain running down my cheeks
in smears—

what if I open up?
not clear...

[Emma]

SCENE: Jeep parked; rain drizzling; Xavi glancing at Emma and Emma glancing at Xavi.

Lyrics she thinks:

your beautiful noise

I'm just two ears...
and you're just a voice.
my job is to hear
your beautiful noise.

just say what you need,
I will heed...
just set it all free,
you will see

I'm just two ears...
and you're just a voice.
my job is to hear
your beautiful noise.
I'm just two ears—
wide *o p e n* by choice—
I just want to hear
your beautiful noise.

just say what you need,
I won't judge...
just set it all free,
don't begrudge...

I'm just two ears...
and you're just a voice.
my job is to hear
your beautiful noise.
I'm just two ears—
wide *o p e n* by choice—
I just want to hear
your beautiful noise.

just say what you need,
loud and clear.
just set it all free,
have no fear.

I'm just two ears...
and you're just a voice.
my job is to hear
your beautiful noise.

[Xavi]

SCENE: Jeep parked; rain drizzling; Xavi sucks a breath in.

XAVI: You... mentioned you're just... *listening*.

EMMA: Yes.

XAVI: So, then, you won't *repeat*... what you hear?

EMMA: If you say it's a secret, I'll keep it that way. Promise.

XAVI: It's a secret we've... kept within the band.

EMMA: I won't let it spread.

XAVI: I'm not... all that people think I am...

Lyrics he voices:

long shot

I'm not a diamond,
not even in the rough.
I'm just a rock
some people thought to buff
until I shined,
so I shine for them.

they call me "star" now
and raise me up the miles.
I play the part
on stages, faking smiles—
reciting lines I've been assigned
so I shine for them.

at times,
I
 fall
 down
 from the highs
to
 lows
 you
 can't imagine—keep masking
how
 hard
 I
 find the rise!

you thought
 it was *easy* for me,
 didn't you?
I'm not
 the favorite to win
 by a
long shot
 doesn't always come through,
 i'n't it true?
but, dammit, I'm trying to!

I'm just a human
who's losing it tonight—
less super than Superman
when fused to kryptonite—
still, I'll fight
to do right by you.

you tell me free it;
you don't know what I hide...
you want the keys, take them
and open me up wide...
I let light in all night
to do right by you.

this time,
 I
 fell
 down
 from cloud nine
and
 crashed
 in
 frozen hell; who could tell
how
 hard
 I've
 faked *I'm fine!?*

you thought
 it was *easy* for me,
 didn't you?
I'm not
 the favorite to win
 by a
long shot
 doesn't always come through,

i'n't it true?
but, dammit, I'm trying to!

MORE TO COME

[Emma]

SCENE: Emma's apartment; Emma post-shower in clean, dry clothes... facing the mirror and freaking out.

Lyrics she thinks:

he's welcome...

I want to be good, I want to be kind.
he needed a roof; I felt so inclined that
I said, "borrow mine...
ALL I've got; it's fine!"

the
toys I squeeze to cope.
the
toilet, the sink, the soap.

the
shower, so bleached it glows!
the
towels and clean, dry clothes!

and guess what he chose?

what kind of girl can truly blurt,
"I've got a rockstar in my shirt!"

I've got a rockstar in my shirt!

he's in my home! he's in my room!
my silly heart is going BOOM!

but NOT for reasons you'd assume...

my brain is screaming out, "ALERT—
can't trust he cleaned off ALL his dirt!!!"

what's left of it is on that shirt!

it's in my home! it's in my room!
now, I CANNOT wait to vacuum!

bad enough I've grabbed the broom...

what kind of fan would think, I must
get cleaning 'cause he's leaving dust—
skin, tresses, sweat, et cetera—
all over—DISGUSTING!

what kind of fan would start to sob
while busy, wiping every knob
and surface, floor to countertop,
her fingertips throbbing...

he's welcome, I asseverate it!
criss and cross my heart!
just so much... *contaminated*
that it's tearing me apart!

I'm playing it cool, I'm keeping him blind
to just what I do mean by "I don't mind at
all that you're at mine!
spend the night; it's fine!"

so
unforeseeable,
it's
unrepeatable.

so
inconceivable,
it's
unbelievable!

it's lyrical...

what kind of girl has ever said,
"I've got a rockstar in my bed!"

I've got a rockstar in my bed!

he's in my home! he's in my room!
my silly heart is going BOOM!

but NOT for reasons you'd assume...

my brain is blaring out, "CODE RED:
his arms or, worse, his legs may spread!"

I'm social distancing instead...

he's in my home! he's in my room!
I would click leave, but this ain't Zoom!

dear couch—please—save me from my doom!

what kind of fan would think to fall
asleep a long way down the hall
instead of all tucked in his clutch?
why's this feel *wrong*?

what kind of fan will ever be
as CLOSE to him as present me?
and I don't even want to touch
platonically!

he's welcome, that, I guarantee!
criss and cross my heart!
just so much... *proximity*
that it's tearing me apart!

he's in my home, he's in my room.
we'll share the night 'til dawn's in bloom.

he's welcome here, I'm telling him.
first I've gone on such a limb.

[Xavi]

SCENE: Emma's apartment; Xavi staggers out of her bedroom, half asleep, and finds her in the living room.

XAVI: Em?

EMMA: (*gasp*)

XAVI: Emma?

EMMA: (*cringe*)

XAVI: Emma, you gonna come to sleep soon?

EMMA: (*a whisper*) I don't wanna sleep with you.

XAVI: I don't wanna steal your bed.

EMMA: But it's the bed. You're the guest. You get the bed.

XAVI: It's *your* bed.

EMMA: I changed the bedclothes; it's anyone's...

XAVI: It's big enough for 2.

EMMA: (*a whisper*) I don't wanna sleep with you.

XAVI: I really don't wanna sleep... without you.

EMMA: (*flinch*)

XAVI: 'Cause I don't sleep when I'm alone. Haven't had to since I got Amory. There's... just something 'bout her presence.

EMMA: Just... that?

XAVI: Keeps all my monsters at bay, yeah.

Lyrics he voices:

monsters

I turn off lights—invite the night in;
lose my sight of what is right and

real

as shadows swarm in every corner—
seize the wardrobe—storm the floorboards—

and congeal...

into monsters so damn monstrous,
my worst nightmare's all they promise

to reveal...

they grin,

eyes grim,
and begin to all creep in
while I kick
all my limbs
'gainst the quicksand I'm deep in!

fly awake, find I'm screaming!
and then she's with me.
meet her gaze, says I'm dreaming,
and I breathe in...
and out
relievedly.

I hold her tight and pray for night's end,
my respite from fight-or-flight and

fear.

the shadows seep into the niches!
steal towards ceilings' upper reaches!

cage me here!

ever monsters so damn monstrous,
one more nightmare's all they promise

will appear...

they lurk
no sound—
but my pounding heart's beat!
and I jerk
around
'til I'm bound in my sheets!

fly awake, find I'm screaming!
and then she's with me.
meet her gaze, says I'm dreaming,
and I breathe in...
and out
relievedly.

so just be with me;
stay in reach all night.

please.

that is all I need
now until it's light...

so just be with me;
drift off by my side.

please.

that is all I need
while the monsters bide...

when I wake up screaming,
I'll see you.
just say that I'm dreaming,
I'll breathe in
and out,
relieved it's true.

[Emma]

SCENE: Emma's apartment; the living room.

EMMA: Okay.

XAVI: You'll come to sleep now?

EMMA: I'll...

XAVI: And we'll share your bed?

EMMA: (*gulp*) With. One. Rule.

XAVI: Okay.

EMMA: We draw a line down the middle. You choose a side, then you stay put.

XAVI: (*nod*)

EMMA: That's the rule.

XAVI: (*nod*)

EMMA: I'll have my own blanket, too, just to help enforce it.

XAVI: (*nod*)

EMMA: That way we don't touch.

Lyrics she thinks:

feels all right

1 bed,
2 bodies—
the threat in my head's
you want me!

the words in the verses
I've heard now taunt me.

if truth were a ditty,
then you'd come to kiss me.
we'd both feel the fire;
I'd vote to let this be
just a kiss.
we're sharing tonight—
song's amiss;
my heart won't ignite—
I'm fine with it
'cause this feels all right.

1 bed,
2 bodies—

new heat in the sheets
has shocked me!

the scenes on big screens
that I've seen now rock me!

if truth were a movie,
boy, you'd move into me!
we'd sure feel the fire
and burn in it truly—
chick-flick bliss (blech)!
we're sharing tonight—
film's amiss;
my heart won't ignite—
I'm fine with it
'cause this feels all right.

1 bed,
2 bodies—
soft hum of your lungs
has *stopped* me

'cause no phrases on pages
I've gazed at top peace.

our truth ain't a novel;
all *you* want is to sleep.
we're no fuel for fire;
we don't need to fall deep.
new hypothesis...
we're sharing tonight—
story's not amiss
'cause this feels all right.

EPILOGUE

[Emma]

SCENE: Emma's apartment the next afternoon.

Lyrics she thinks:

I'm looking up

thought I was broken—
beyond all repair,
meant for aloneness,
unworthy of care.

been asking, who'd notice
if I weren't there...
my list answered, *no one*,
then *you* caught my stare.

you'd left the door open,
not fully aware—
too caught in the lowness
you felt then to care.

desperate for closeness,
I pulled up a chair—
no clue that you'd dare
to share...

and it hit me like a blow
straight out of nowhere—
and I felt it head to toe,
a breath of fresh air!
to be shown I'm not alone;
my tears aren't *rare*—
and to hear God made us both
all right, I swear...

for once, I'm looking up;
I'm seeing sun in rainy sky!
first time my smile's mine;
I say, I'm fine, it ain't a lie!

I'm feeling *my* version of HIGH—
all 'cause we two shared a cry.

thought I was broken—
a brain with no blocks
of code there to open
this ribcage's locks.

my heart's fully closed off,
but safe in its box.
it longs for a soul's love,
yet *balks* when one knocks.

you heard what I spoke then,
not judging my thoughts...
all there in the moment,
just listening lots.

desperate for closure,
I told you the plot—
you helped me unknot
each knot!

and it hit me like a blow
snuck in between blocks—
and I felt it head to toe,
tsunami of shocks!
to be shown I'm not alone;
we share some sore spots—
and to learn new words—*aro*
sure suits me LOTS...

for once, I'm looking up;
I'm seeing sun in rainy sky!
first time my smile's mine;
I say, I'm fine, it ain't a lie!

I'm feeling *my* version of HIGH—
all 'cause we two shared a cry.

[Xavi]

SCENE: XYZ performing on stage in Fenway Park.

Lyrics Xavi sings:

safe place to land

g
r
a
v
i
t
y
you know it gets the
best of me!
I watch my steps, but
then I see
just to where I'll be
if I take a spill.
treading carefully,
I stare down until...

with a twist of fate, I fulfill
my own worst fear...

then you take my hand;
I don't crash like a wave against sand—
'cause you help me stand
first I've known such a safe place to land.

s
a
n
i
t
y
it comes and goes—
elusively.
I hide my face;
just who can't see
right through my guarded guise,
to the truth that lies
right here, behind these eyes,

clear as cloudless skies—

I'm still not okay—'spite my tries!
I'm back off the deep...

then you take my hand;
I don't crash like a wave against sand—
'cause you help me stand
first I've known such a safe place to land.

and you lift me up
when I'm sinking down...
and you stay by me,
help me breathe like I'm not about to drown.
and you pull me in
when I'm spinning out...
and you cling to me,
set me free from my every fear and doubt.

while I've got you around,
I know I'm safe and sound...

when you take my hand,
I don't crash like a wave against sand—
'cause you help me stand
first I've known such a safe place to land.

don't let go of my hand.
you're my safe place to land.