

## JULIETTE'S JOURNAL

*I keep thinking I need to stay calm, that it's all in my head, that everything is going to be fine and someone is going to open the door now, someone is going to let me out of here. I keep thinking it's going to happen. I keep thinking it has to happen, because things like this don't just happen. This doesn't happen. People aren't forgotten like this. Not abandoned like this.*

*This doesn't just happen.*

*My face is caked with blood from when they threw me on the ground and my hands are still shaking even as I write this. This pen is my only outlet, my only voice, because I have no one else to speak to, no mind but my own to drown in and all the lifeboats are taken and all the life preservers are broken and I don't know how to swim I can't swim I can't swim and it's getting so hard. It's getting so hard. It's like there are a million screams caught inside of my chest but I have to keep them all in because what's the point of screaming if you'll never be heard and no one will ever hear me in here. No one will ever hear me ever again.*

*I've learned to stare at things.*

*The walls. My hands. The cracks in the walls. The lines on my fingers. The shades of gray in the concrete. The shape of my fingernails. I pick one thing and stare at it for what must be hours. I keep time in my head by counting the seconds as they pass. I keep days in my head by writing them down. Today is day two. Today is the second day. Today is a day.*

*Today.*

*It's so cold. It's so cold it's so cold.*

*Please please please*

*I started screaming today.*

*It's a strange thing, to never know peace. To know that no matter where you go, there is no sanctuary. That the threat of pain is always a whisper away. I'm not safe locked into these 4 walls, I was never safe leaving my house, and I couldn't even feel safe in the 14 years I lived at home. The asylum kills people every day, the world has already been taught to fear me, and my home is the same place where my father locked me in my room every night and my mother screamed at me for being the abomination she was forced to raise.*

*She always said it was my face.*

*There was something about my face, she said, that she couldn't stand. Something about my eyes, the way I looked at her, the fact that I even existed. She'd always tell me to stop looking at her. She'd always scream it. Like I might attack her. Stop looking at me, she'd scream. You just stop looking at me, she'd scream.*

*She put my hand in the fire once.*

*Just to see if it would burn, she said. Just to check if it was a regular hand, she said.*

*I was 6 years old then.*

*I remember because it was my birthday.*

*Am I insane yet?*

*Has it happened yet?*

*How will I ever know?*

*Sometimes I close my eyes and paint these walls a different color.*

*I imagine I'm wearing warm socks and sitting by a fire. I imagine someone's given me a book to read, a story to take me away from the torture of my own mind. I want to be someone else somewhere else with something else to fill my mind. I want to run, to feel the wind tug at my hair. I want to pretend that this is just a story within a story. That this cell is just a scene,*

*that these hands don't belong to me, that this window leads to somewhere beautiful if only I could break it. I pretend this pillow is clean, I pretend this bed is soft. I pretend and pretend and pretend until the world becomes so breathtaking behind my eyelids that I can no longer contain it. But then my eyes fly open and I'm caught around the throat by a pair of hands that won't stop suffocating suffocating suffocating*

*My thoughts, I think, will soon be sound.*

*My mind, I hope, will soon be found.*

*I wonder what they're thinking. My parents. I wonder where they are. I wonder if they're okay now, if they're happy now, if they finally got what they wanted. I wonder if my mother will ever have another child. I wonder if someone will ever be kind enough to kill me and I wonder if hell is better than here. I wonder what my face looks like now. I wonder if I'll ever breathe fresh air again.*

*I wonder about so many things.*

*Sometimes I'll stay awake for days just counting everything I can find. I count the walls, the cracks in the walls, my fingers and toes. I count the springs in the bed, the threads in the blanket, the steps it takes to cross the room and back. I count my teeth and the individual hairs on my head and the number of seconds I can hold my breath.*

*But sometimes I get so tired that I forget I'm not allowed to wish for things anymore and I find myself wishing for the one thing I've always wanted. The only thing I've always dreamt about.*

*I wish all the time for a friend.*

*I dream about it. I imagine what it would be like. To smile and be smiled upon. To have a person to confide in, someone who wouldn't throw things at me or stick my hands in the fire or beat me for being born. Someone who would hear that I'd been thrown away and would try to find me, who would never be afraid of me.*

*Someone who'd know I'd never try to hurt them.*

*I fold myself into a corner of this room and bury my head in my knees and rock back and forth and back and forth and back and forth and I wish and I wish and I wish and I dream of impossible things until I've cried myself to sleep.*

*I wonder what it would be like to have a friend.*

*And then I wonder who else is locked in this asylum. I wonder where the other screams are coming from.*

*I wonder if they're coming from me.*

*There's something simmering inside of me.*

*Something I've never dared to tap into, something I'm afraid to acknowledge. There's a part of me clawing to break free from the cage I've trapped it in, banging on the doors of my heart begging to be free.*

*Begging to let go.*

*Every day I feel like I'm reliving the same nightmare. I open my mouth to shout, to fight, to swing my fists but my vocal chords are cut, my arms are heavy and weighted down as if trapped in wet cement and I'm screaming but no one can hear me, no one can reach me and I'm caught. And it's killing me.*

*I've always had to make myself submissive, subservient, twisted into a pleading, passive mop just to make everyone else feel safe and comfortable. My existence has become a fight to prove I'm harmless, that I'm not a threat, that I'm capable of living among other human beings without hurting them.*

*And I'm so tired I'm so tired I'm so tired I'm so tired and sometimes I get so angry*

*I don't know what's happening to me.*

*We had homes. Before.*

*All different kinds.*

*1-story homes. 2-story homes. 3-story homes.*

*We bought lawn ornaments and twinkle lights, learned to ride bikes without training wheels. We purchased lives confined within 1, 2, 3 stories already built, stories caught inside of structures we could not change.*

*We lived in those stories for a while.*

*We followed the tale laid out for us, the prose pinned down in every square foot of space we'd acquired. We were content with the plot twists that only mildly redirected our lives. We signed on the dotted line for the things we didn't know we cared about. We ate the things we shouldn't, spent money when we couldn't, lost sight of the Earth we had to inhabit, and wasted wasted everything. Food. Water. Resources.*

*Soon the skies were gray with chemical pollution and the plants and animals were sick from genetic modification, and diseases rooted themselves in our air, our meals, our blood and bones. The food disappeared. The people were dying. Our empire fell to pieces.*

*The Reestablishment said they would help us. Save us. Rebuild our society.*

*Instead they tore us all apart.*

*I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry I'm so sorry I'm so so sorry I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry I'm so sorry I'm so so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry I'm so so sorry I'm so sorry I'm so sorry I'm so sorry I'm so so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry I'm so sorry I'm so so sorry I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry I'm so so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry I'm so sorry I'm so so sorry I'm so sorry. I'm so so sorry. I'm so sorry I'm so sorry. I'm so so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry I'm so sorry I'm so so sorry I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry I'm so so sorry. I'm sorry I'm so sorry please forgive me.*

*It was an accident.*

*Forgive me*

*Please forgive me*

*Swallow the tears back often enough and they'll start feeling like acid  
dripping down your throat.*

*It's that terrible moment when you're sitting still so still so still because you  
don't want them to see you cry you don't want to cry but your lips won't stop  
trembling and your eyes are filled to the brim with please and I beg you and  
please and I'm sorry and please and have mercy and maybe this time it'll  
be different but it's always the same. There's no one to run to for comfort.  
No one on your side.*

*Light a candle for me, I used to whisper to no one.*

*Someone*

*Anyone*

*If you're out there*

*Please tell me you can feel this fire.*

*These letters are all I have left.*

*26 friends to tell my stories to.*

*26 letters are all I need. I can stitch them together to create oceans and  
ecosystems. I can fit them together to form planets and solar systems. I can  
use letters to construct skyscrapers and metropolitan cities populated by  
people, places, things, and ideas that are more real to me than these 4  
walls.*

*I need nothing but letters to live. Without them I would not exist.*

*Because these words I write down are the only proof I have that I'm still alive.*

*Sometimes I think the shadows are moving.*

*Sometimes I think someone might be watching.*

*Sometimes this idea scares me and sometimes the idea makes me so absurdly happy I can't stop crying. And then sometimes I think I have no idea when I started losing my mind in here. Nothing seems real anymore and I can't tell if I'm screaming out loud or only in my head.*

*There's no one here to hear me.*

*To tell me I'm not dead.*

*No one wants a dandelion.*

*They crop up all over the place, ugly and unfortunate, an average blossom in a world desperately seeking beauty. They're weeds, people say. They're uninteresting and offer no fragrance and there are too many of them, too much of them, we don't want them, destroy them.*

*Dandelions are a nuisance.*

*We desire the buttercups, the daffodils, the morning glories. We want the azalea, the poinsettia, the calla lily. We pluck them from our gardens and plant them in our homes and we don't seem to remember their toxic nature.*

*We don't seem to care that*

*if you get too close?*

*if you take a small bite?*

*The beauty is replaced with pain and laced with a poison that laughs in your blood, destroys your organs, infects your heart.*

*But pick a dandelion.*

*Pick a dandelion and make a salad, eat the leaves, the flower, the stem.  
Thread it in your hair, plant it in the ground and watch it thrive.*

*Pick a dandelion and close your eyes*

*make a wish*

*blow it into the wind.*

*Watch it*

*change*

*the*

*world.*

*Hate.*

*It's poison, an unrelenting punch to the gut, an injustice injected directly  
into your bloodstream that slowly paralyzes your organs until you can't  
breathe*

*you can't*

*breathe*

*because loneliness has stuffed itself into your clothes and you're rotting to  
death in a dark corner of the world and you're already forgotten.*

*You never even were.*

*Pick a cloud just to pin it down and wear it in your hair.*

*Jump up to catch its soft soft strands, its feathery wisps; piles of tufted snow  
sailing through the air, cotton candy stretched so thin it melts the moment  
you try to taste it.*

*Life is like a cloud.*



*It comes in a million shapes and sizes and it offers no guarantees, no certainties, no sympathies for the man who told his kid he'd fly a kite today, no consideration for the girl who was sure she'd see the sun today, no promises for the weary world and the wants wants wants of which it has too many today.*

*Life is like that.*

*Sometimes full and fluffy and floating along and sometimes dark and angry and sobbing sobbing sobbing anger and passion and vengeance and retaliation.*

*It's agony*

*It's anguish*

*It's a gift, a lesson, a reminder.*

*Because only once the storm has passed, only once the tears have flooded the rivers and gorged the ground and washed away the dirt the debris the destruction and decay, only then—*

*only then will the sun step outside*

*smile to the sky*

*and dare to shine.*

*I count everything.*

*Even numbers, odd numbers, multiples of ten. I count the ticks of the clock I count the tocks of the clock I count the lines between the lines on a sheet of paper. I count the broken beats of my heart I count my pulse and my blinks and the number of tries it takes to inhale enough oxygen for my lungs. I stay like this I stand like this I count like this until the feeling stops. Until the tears stop spilling, until my fists stop shaking, until my heart stops aching.*

*There are never enough numbers.*

*Loneliness is a strange sort of thing.*

*It creeps up on you, quiet and still, sits by your side in the dark, strokes your hair as you sleep. It wraps itself around your bones, squeezing so tight you almost can't breathe, almost can't hear the pulse racing in your blood as it rushes up your skin and touches its lips to the soft hairs at the back of your neck. It leaves lies in your heart, lies next to you at night, leeches the light out from every corner. It's a constant companion, clasping your hand only to yank you down when you're struggling to stand up, catching your tears only to force them down your throat. It scares you simply by standing by your side.*

*You wake up in the morning and wonder who you are. You fail to fall asleep at night and tremble in your skin. You doubt you doubt you doubt*

*do I*

*don't I*

*should I*

*why won't I*

*And even when you're ready to let go. When you're ready to break free. When you're ready to be brand-new. Loneliness is an old friend standing beside you in the mirror, looking you in the eye, challenging you to live your life without it. You can't find the words to fight yourself, to fight the words screaming that you're not enough never enough never ever enough.*

*Loneliness is a bitter, wretched companion.*

*Sometimes it just won't let go.*

*I am a thief.*

*I stole this notebook and this pen from one of the doctors, from one of his lab coats when he wasn't looking, and I shoved them both down my pants. This was just before he ordered those men to come and get me. The ones in the strange suits with the thick gloves and the gas masks with the foggy*

*plastic windows hiding their eyes. They were aliens, I remember thinking. I remember thinking they must've been aliens because they couldn't have been human, the ones who handcuffed my hands behind my back, the ones who strapped me to my seat. They stuck Tasers to my skin over and over for no reason other than to hear me scream but I wouldn't. I whimpered but I never said a word. I felt the tears streak down my cheeks but I wasn't crying.*

*I think it made them angry.*

*They slapped me awake even though my eyes were open when we arrived. Someone unstrapped me without removing my handcuffs and kicked me in both kneecaps before ordering me to rise. And I tried. I tried but I couldn't and finally 6 hands shoved me out the door and my face was bleeding on the concrete for a while. I can't really remember the part where they dragged me inside.*

*I feel cold all the time.*

*I feel empty, like there is nothing inside of me but this broken heart, the only organ left in this shell. I feel the bleats echo within me, I feel the thumping reverberate around my skeleton. I have a heart, says science, but I am a monster, says society. And I know it, of course I know it. I know what I've done. I'm not asking for sympathy.*

*But sometimes I think—sometimes I wonder—if I were a monster—surely, I would feel it by now?*

*I would feel angry and vicious and vengeful. I'd know blind rage and bloodlust and a need for vindication.*

*Instead I feel an abyss within me that's so deep, so dark I can't see within it; I can't see what it holds. I do not know what I am or what might happen to me.*

*I do not know what I might do again.*

*I sit here every day.*

*174 175 days I've sat here so far.*

*Some days I stand up and stretch and feel these stiff bones, these creaky joints, this trampled spirit cramped inside my being. I roll my shoulders, I blink my eyes, I count the seconds creeping up the walls, the minutes shivering under my skin, the breaths I have to remember to take. Sometimes I allow my mouth to drop open, just a little bit; I touch my tongue to the backs of my teeth and the seam of my lips and I walk around this small space, I trail my fingers along the cracks in the concrete and wonder, I wonder what it would be like to speak out loud and be heard. I hold my breath, listen closely for anything, any sound of life, and wonder at the beauty, the impossibility of possibly hearing another person breathing beside me.*

*I stop. I stand still. I close my eyes and try to remember a world beyond these walls. I wonder what it would be like to know that I'm not dreaming, that this isolated existence is not caged within my own mind.*

*And I do. I do I wonder, I think about it all the time.*

*What it would be like to kill myself.*

*Because I never really know, I still can't tell the difference, I'm never quite certain whether or not I'm actually alive.*

*So I sit here.*

*I sit here every day.*

*Run, I said to myself.*

*Run until your lungs collapse, until the wind whips and snaps at your tattered clothes, until you're a blur that blends into the background.*

*Run, Juliette, run faster, run until your bones break and your shins split and your muscles atrophy and your heart dies because it was always too big for your chest and it beat too fast for too long and run.*

*Run run run until you can't hear their feet behind you. Run until they drop their fists and their shouts dissolve in the air. Run with your eyes open and your mouth shut and dam the river rushing up behind your eyes. Run, Juliette.*

*Run until you drop dead.*

*Make sure your heart stops before they ever reach you. Before they ever touch you.*

*Run, I said.*

*Just a moment.*

*Just one second, just one more minute, just give me another hour or maybe the weekend to think it over it's not so much it's not so hard it's all we ever ask for it's a simple request.*

*But the moments the seconds the minutes the hours the days and years become one big mistake, one extraordinary opportunity slipped right through our fingers because we couldn't decide, we couldn't understand, we needed more time, we didn't know what to do.*

*We don't even know what we've done.*

*We have no idea how we even got here when all we ever wanted was to wake up in the morning and go to sleep at night and maybe stop for ice cream on the way home and that one decision, that one choice, that one accidental opportunity unraveled everything we've ever known and ever believed in and what do we do?*

*What do we do*

*from here?*

*On the darkest days you have to search for a spot of brightness, on the coldest days you have to seek out a spot of warmth; on the bleakest days you have to keep your eyes onward and upward and on the saddest days you*

*have to leave them open to let them cry. To then let them dry. To give them a chance to wash out the pain in order to see fresh and clear once again.*

*Nothing in this life will ever make sense to me but I can't help but try to collect the change and hope it's enough to pay for our mistakes.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I am not insane. I am not insane.*

*I don't know when it started.*

*I don't know why it started.*

*I don't know anything about anything except for the screaming.*

*My mother screaming when she realized she could no longer touch me. My father screaming when he realized what I'd done to my mother. My parents screaming when they'd lock me in my room and tell me I should be grateful. For their food. For their humane treatment of this thing that could not possibly be their child. For the yardstick they used to measure the distance I needed to keep away.*

*I ruined their lives, is what they said to me.*

*I stole their happiness. Destroyed my mother's hope for ever having children again.*

Couldn't I see what I'd done? *is what they'd ask me.* Couldn't I see that I'd ruined everything?

*I tried so hard to fix what I'd ruined. I tried every single day to be what they wanted. I tried all the time to be better but I never really knew how.*

*I only know now that the scientists are wrong.*

*The world is flat.*

*I know because I was tossed right off the edge and I've been trying to hold on for seventeen years. I've been trying to climb back up for seventeen years but it's nearly impossible to beat gravity when no one is willing to give you a hand.*

*When no one wants to risk touching you.*

*One word, two lips, three four five fingers form one fist.*

*One corner, two parents, three four five reasons to hide.*

*One child, two eyes, three four seventeen years of fear.*

*A broken broomstick, a pair of wild faces, angry whispers, locks on my door.*

*Look at me, is what I wanted to say to you. Talk to me every once in a while. Find me a cure for these tears, I'd really like to exhale for the first time in my life.*

*The broken broomstick was the mediator between me and them.*

*The broomstick broke on my back.*

*I remember televisions and fireplaces and porcelain sinks. I remember movie tickets and parking lots and SUVs. I remember hair salons and holidays and window shutters and dandelions and the smell of freshly paved driveways. I remember toothpaste commercials and ladies in high heels and*



*old men in business suits. I remember mailmen and libraries and boy bands and balloons and Christmas trees.*

*I remember being 10 years old when we couldn't ignore the food shortages anymore and things got so expensive no one could afford to live.*

*Why don't you just kill yourself? someone at school asked me once.*

*I think it was the kind of question intended to be cruel, but it was the first time I'd ever contemplated the possibility. I didn't know what to say. Maybe I was crazy to consider it, but I'd always hoped that if I were a good enough girl—if I did everything right, if I said the right things or said nothing at all—I thought my parents would change their minds. I thought they would finally listen when I tried to talk. I thought they would give me a chance. I thought they might finally love me.*

*I always had that stupid hope.*

*There's no light in here. I'm not sure if I'm writing on paper or skin or stone but*

*Were you happy*

*Were you sad*

*Were you scared*

*Were you mad*

*the first time you screamed?*

*Were you fighting for your life your decency your dignity your humanity*

*When someone touches you now, do you scream?*

*When someone smiles at you now, do you smile back?*

*Did he tell you not to scream did he hit you when you cried?*

*Did he have one nose two eyes two lips two cheeks two ears two eyebrows.*

*Was he one human who looked just like you.*

*Color your personality.*

*Shapes and sizes are variety.*

*Your heart is an anomaly.*

*Your actions*

*are*

*the*

*only*

*traces*

*you leave*

*behind.*

*Hang tight*

*Hold on*

*Look up*

*Stay strong*

*Hang on*

*Hold tight*

*Look strong*

*Stay up*

*One day I might break*

*One day I might*

*break*

*free*