

**It Takes a Village: A Collection of Poems on a Certain Kind of Loss**

## It Takes a Village.

There is a village in my mind. It is full of little people going about their little days.

The rule is erratic; some days, the town curmudgeon is mayor, and sometimes it is the youngest, a small nameless child of five years old.

New villagers arrive infrequently, usually carried in by the tide during a storm.

They rarely have any memories of their previous lives—maybe they never had one. Their existence, for all intents and purposes, is sudden. A few, however, can pinpoint the moment of their conception, though this is a rarity for most.

At the town hall, called more and more often of late, those who remember their creation recount the tale to all who will listen. Many do, enraptured, torn between envy and pity for the burden that is this information. Sometimes knowledge is a wound.

When recognized, these stories tend to elicit strong emotions from my poor little villagers, but many do not want to listen. They are skeptical of the veracity. Or simply uninterested. “Do not clutter our minds and days with this; it is sad, and you are making it so. There are holes in your story. We have no recollection of our creation; how can it be that you have any of yours?”

No one ages in my village.

The five-year-old has been five for twenty-three years now. She is anxious, energetic, and curious. Though she is unfit to lead, she often claims the role. Many villagers let her, they couldn't stop her even if they tried; she has been here for decades, after all. She knows the town so well, having explored it thoroughly with the wild, questioning eyes of a protective child.

Recently, however, a new villager has appeared. Her name is Rage.

Aggression and unpredictability are her defining traits. They ebb and flow like the tides that bring new folks to my village's shores.

Sometimes, Rage claims power for the day. She is rarely curtailed. Her rule is more often than not sudden and lingering than short and vanishing.

Rage is feared by most of the village, except for Nostalgia.

Nostalgia is fickle and two-faced; she is friends with many, including the oft-tyrannical Rage. Sometimes Nostalgia whispers in Rage's ear and encourages her to see threats in every villager, in the unending lapping of the surrounding sea. What will those waters bring in next? Who will assume the role of leader and lead us all to another demise? Will this ruin be the final one? Rage quivers.

Sometimes Nostalgia whispers truths, sometimes falsehoods. Often fallacies: I think she likes the chaos... or, upon a gentler reflection, maybe she is just as scared as Rage. Maybe this is why she spins fictitious tales of what could be because of what once was.

Rage is terrified. Beyond her anger and aggression is fear. You can hear it when she recounts her creation. Everyone listens, including myself, when Rage speaks. Their story is as captivating and painful as it is explanatory.

The village, like a high school, has its social groups. For better or for worse, Rage has another friend, surprising though it may be. Her name is Justice.

They have become close. Nearly sisters. Where Rage is impulsive and newer to the village, Justice is pensive and has lived here for as long as anyone can remember.

Justice was once reclusive and quiet, but this changed; she became more sociable and vocal. Many love it when Justice leads.

Some of the villagers, however, whisper that Justice's sociableness brought about the coming of Rage.

I do not think it is as simple as that.

If anything, Rage would have arrived and, had Justice been hermetic, become dictatorial.

Many villagers have warred against Rage, calling her villainous, cruel, corrupting, destructive.

Rage cries out: “I am doing what I can to help you all, you fools! Can you not see our enemies are everywhere? Did you learn nothing from my creation? Have you not listened?”

To which my villagers reply: “But it is you that you speak of! You are our enemy. You have changed the landscape of our town. You claim leadership and hold us hostage to your paranoia.”

Rage shakes. She is hurt and scared; this is not new. But now she sees enemies amongst the villagers who were once allies.

I watch Rage cling to leadership; all are set on sabotaging the safety of the village.

Nostalgia speaks of the pain of creation coming to my village's shores. Justice tries to coax Rage out of the past. Her efforts are in vain.

Everyone gathers at the town hall.

Rage speaks. Emotions are heightened amongst my villagers; the air vibrates with the power of impending action. Rage wants to build defensive walls as high as possible so that none may enter and none may leave. She wants isolation; "all that we need is already here," she explains.

Justice cries out that she will die with no possibility of contact beyond our little village. Nostalgia doesn't care since what is good has already passed.

"If that is the case, then what is bad must have already passed as well."

Rage listens.

The nameless child shakes, listening.

My villagers began to talk at once, the voices rising like a tsunami.

Joy is uncertain; she is deeply conflicted as to the correct path.

Confidence declares isolation to be an uninhabitable and boring mode of existence.

Curiosity is also against isolation. There must be so many other worlds beyond our seas, beyond our little village.

Anxiety is inconclusive. This is likely the influence behind Joy's indecision. Anxiety has a way of swaying Joy.

Optimism is vehemently opposed as well; she sees opportunity abound beyond our borders. In fact, she argues, there should be no walls at all.

Fear is in complete agreement with isolation. Naturally, this will bring security, certainty, protection, and much-needed control.

Fear is predictable.

I watch.

Rage becomes angrier, her fear growing.

"Why can't we make a decision? Why can't we see the path before us with any sort of clarity? What is wrong with us all? With me? What is so wrong that we cannot seem to exist in harmony? Something is broken, rotting us all from the inside out, like a weed. We are in ruin." Rage cries out. She is a pot on the boil.

Rage does what she does best – react.

She screams and condemns, and curses everyone, including themselves. "We have failed ourselves. We have been blindly, blissfully ignorant of the horrors of the world and for this, we are to blame for our hurt. My creation, my birth, it was violent. Do none of you remember? Are you all so stupid to think there is goodness? Look around; you smallminded fools, you disappointments. We are the cause, the rot. We brought it upon ourselves. We are disgusting. We are deserving of shame and judgment. We have nothing to offer beyond the weight of the burden that is us. And now this! Me! I am here to remind you all of your failings. You fucking stupid, disgusting, ugly, ugly people. I hate you. I hate you. I hate your inability to speak up for yourselves. Lie there, then, take it. I hate you all."

She beats against the walls of the town hall. She smashes art, burns books, and wreaks havoc throughout my village.

"You are undeserving of beauty. You are just a disappointment. Beauty and art and learning are for people who have futures. You are all the walking dead. You deserve nothing; you can't even trust yourselves to make a decision. To understand the world. I understand the world. And I understand that there is no place for any of you in to. You have been living pointlessly, and it is your own fucking fault. I hate every single one of you for my creation and your ignorance. I hate you so fucking much."

Oh, my sweet village. Oh, my terrified, hurting Rage.

When she is finally done, having well and truly exhausted herself, she sits down on the grassy field in front of the town hall and cries. The other villagers come out of hiding and gather around Rage.

Slowly, like a shadow spreading out from a rising sun, a figure emerges from behind her.

It is Sadness.

Sadness brings Rage into her arms and tells her to mourn, to cry, to grieve the violence that forced her creation and introduction to my village. While holding Rage, Sadness turns to Joy and Justice and takes both into her arms. Like

a snowfall blanketing a once green landscape, Sadness grows to embrace all my villagers, who fall, one by one, willingly into her arms—my tiny, mighty, scared villagers.

Sadness tells everyone to mourn.

She says: “You are lost to yourselves; feel the pain of that. Do not deny it. Do not fight it. Be baptized in your mourning; wash yourself in it.”

She looks down at all my villagers, cheeks stained and reddened by tears, and asks, “Have you all forgotten that you have experienced a great tragedy? I see now that many of you have. Look around, then! Our village has frayed. Rage remembers the cause of this fraying; she feels it every day. Where do you think her paranoia and desperation have come from? She has become a pariah, a leper, because those around her have decided to deny, forget, and ignore. And in doing so, we have denied parts of ourselves. We have brought about our own demise. Stop blaming Rage for her pain. Let us mourn then and try to remember the tragedy that has befallen us.” Sadness paused, “I will not lie to you all; in grief, there must come truth. This truth will hurt. It will influence our decisions, our actions, and our ability to protect ourselves. Let us mourn the assurance we once took for granted. Let me into your arms and you into mine, and together, we will hold each other and grieve who we once were.”

My little villagers. They all take hold of each other and release a collective breath.

Rage calms. Justice weeps. Nostalgia cries. Joy whimpers. Optimism hopes. Anxiety breathes. The nameless child watches.

All are beginning to remember, to come to terms with what befell them and acknowledge the work they will need to do to heal.

This is my little village. Many live here. They exist and go about their days.

A great tragedy befell them; few seem to want to remember. But when does anyone wish to recall those moments most painful to us? Sadness does not let anyone forget. This is not a cruelty but a kindness.

Rage is quieter lately. She speaks with Justice often.

Nostalgia and Sadness have become good friends; they can be found talking well into the wee hours of the night. Their conversations, though private, have a way of diffusing, bleeding out like a mist, into the hearts of all my villagers.

The nameless child is no longer allowed to lead; she tries, however. Sometimes, she is successful. Mostly though, she has been tasked with the very important ordeal of colouring and trying to climb the tallest trees in the village. She has been given permission to be a kid again.

This is my village. They are me, and I am them. I hold onto my Rage, but I can no longer let it consume me.

The leadership of this town called Me must be entirely and consciously my own.

---

### **Lost to Yourself.**

We stay up till 4 am.

You insist on driving me home. It's snowing out, a blizzard. You shovel the car free. This kind of kindness feels enveloping. I try to help, poorly. You laugh.

I don't know how else to consider my existence as anything other than burdensome. You're so good. You may be the first good I've touched or been touched by. I don't know how to trust it.

I want to do things for you, you say. What can I offer in return for something so delicate and genuine and loving? I don't know how else to be other than giving, and here you are, offering.

This violence has me in a tornado. My emotions in extremes. You're consistent, and I'm just trying to grasp a firm hold of me. How could someone want what feels so unravelled? I've become lost to myself, so how can I possibly have found you?

I ask you if you've ever been a stranger to yourself. Quizzical. You know, when you look in the mirror and don't recognize yourself? Kindly, thoughtfully, you say no. But there is a gentleness to your no. I don't feel judged, just lost and afraid of being found. I need to find myself first.

Maybe, when we are lost, if we allow ourselves the grace, we can find ourselves again in the arms and eyes and words of someone else—someone kind. It's hard to believe. Someone else whittled me into this stranger; how can it be, then, that I could find myself through someone else? It feels oxymoronic and overwhelming.

Maybe this introduction of selectiveness into my psyche isn't so bad. Maybe it'll help me find my way to the person I am going to want to be.

---

### **A Fox to The Ducks.**

Last month, I bought ducks. Several, in fact.

Runner ducks, they are called.

I bought them for my garden. I wanted to watch them watch the flowers. Eat all the pesky snails that nibble away at my hard work.

Weeks went by, and, with a pretentious intentionality, I would make my morning coffee and watch them watch the garden. I came to love them. A mother, or a god, watching her responsibilities.

Then, early one morning,

With dew still settled on the earth,

I was awoken by their cries. In the night, a fox had found my runner ducks.

Not all of them, small miracles, but one.

I think the one the fox found would say no miracle occurred that day.

The cries of my fraught surviving ducks woke me, but I was too late. One of my ducks had, indeed, been killed.

The remaining were distraught.

Fresh blood coloured my garden's grass. They had witnessed a tragedy.

I think the ducks that survived the fox would agree, no miracle occurred that day.

I could not find the body, but I found remnants of the battle. I'd like to think the duck put up a good fight.

I moved through my garden slowly. I watched my remaining ducks exist in panic. I can only assume what they felt was a restless, swelling, confusing fear.

I felt sad for them and angry with myself for not protecting them better. For not anticipating something as usual and consistent as life's cycle of violence.

Underneath my sadness and anger, I felt a curiosity. I wondered if the ducks, having witnessed the demise of one of their companions, were now aware of their own mortality. Was their state of panic induced by an abrupt introduction to existential empathy?

When do we become personally familiar with existentialism?

One of their own, my ducks, had been killed. Died in front of their eyes.

I watched them watch the world and realized,

What is a trauma to the duck is but a passing moment to the fox.

---

### **Brutal Today**

It's the dog sitting in the dreary, misty March morning cold.

It's the sunken, yellowed couch dragged out under the overpass.

It's the surrounding litter, bottles and butts and plastics.  
These, the evidence of our casual cruelties. Unto others. Unto ourselves.  
This is listlessness. This is youth in adulthood. This is restlessness. This is searching for answers to  
wrestle control over an uncontrollable world.  
This is love and loving and falling out of both.  
This is projection onto an endlessly unfolding and careless nature.  
See existentialism in every tumbling leaf, around every corner. Find yourself in every movement of this  
earth.  
Is that beautiful or hideous? Maybe it's both. You've got something to say, clawing its way out of you;  
this is why it sticks to every surface your eyes paint themselves upon. This is why you'll find yourself in  
everything and everyone. That may just be a beautiful thing.  
Drown in empathy. It is so much better than to swim in apathy.