

your time has expired

**5:31 pm -**

“Hurry up now we haven’t got all day.”

The lady greeting me looks to be some sort of a ragged personification of a gloomy thunderstorm and frustratedly hands me the goddamn sticker as if handing out another teen her expiration date was something so worth complaining about.

“You know, I’d be a little more grateful if I were you,” she says, smoothing out her gray hair despite it being hopelessly matted and tangled. “All you teens are the same. Disgraceful. When I was your age I had to actually walk. You guys have planes and everything so don’t stoop around with that FACE on your face.”

She mutters on while I just focus on that stupid hair. A clump of it is sticking out from the top like a wad of chicken wire. That one strand keeps swinging in front of her face and it takes me a while to slowly tune into her staticky station again..

“Are you even listening?” She slams her papers down and points a manicured finger my way. “Get your ass in line and hurry up. Either board your flight willingly in a line with all the rest of you hooligans or I can call someone to help you.”

I sigh and pick up the sticker from beneath the check-in counter. Her poorly painted lips are pursed together and she stares down at me with a smug look as if she actually did something. I give her the sweetest smile I can conjure and place the sticker on my shirt. The sickly neon blue and red stripes on the plastic circle stick out from my toned down clothes. So much for patriotism.

Crowds of teenagers about my age flood into the airport, each one of them carrying absolutely nothing. Some of them are crying. I don’t blame them but crying is something that I’m practically unable to do at this point. Maybe something’s wrong with me. I join a group of at least thirty kids and we look at each other. Everyone’s eyes are blank and yet some sort of message is translated between each and every one of us. *What the hell do we do now?*

A trio of burly security guards disrupt the temporary connection and shove us aboard the plane. A bunch of absolute goddamn silence follows and we all close our eyes as the plane starts to take off.

I’ve always hated that sound.

**6:42 pm -**

The entire plane shakes us awake as it makes its brutal landing with the gravel below. We unbuckle and shuffle into the cramped middle aisle of the plane. Someone already tried jumping off with a parachute earlier but the flight attendants proved to be extraordinarily fast. A clear sharp voice suddenly penetrates the depressing air about us. "Thank you for flying with us. Please take all of your luggage and exit to the left. Your stay here was greatly appreciated. Please thank the pilots and my fellow attendees on your way out, thank you."

And we move up the line like some strange slow centipede. The pilots sure look cheery enough and every sickening flight attendant gazes at us with a sense of disdain. If they were going for a look of pity, they certainly failed. On our way out we don't thank them. We shove our way into the open air and flip them off. It's a nice thing, isn't it? Watching all the people who wronged you disappear into the sky. I hope they never have kids.

We wander together a bit until we see a small town in the distance. The streets are abandoned and the twinkling neon signs flash like those old ferris wheels buried deep in my memory. Somewhere, a 90s song plays in the background.

"So now what?" It's a boy with brown hair who finally speaks.

I turn to shift my gaze towards him and the people around me. Not people. Teens. The "forgotten kids" is what we like to call ourselves. Everyone else seems to have given us the name: "trouble". It's got a nice ring to it but it's not a great name.

"Well shit if it's actually our last day here then why are we standing around?" A lean girl answers. She's got to be only a year older than me. "I mean, that is what the pamphlet said, right? It's our last day here. Ever."

No one answers but I know that we all know.

"We'll be fine," the brown-haired kid sucks in a shaky breath. "Let's just keep moving." He brings his hand over his head, gesturing for us to follow him.

And we do.

We don't know where we're going.

We just run.

**7:01 pm -**

The theater is where we go first. Kicking down the glass door, we manage to find an unlocked auditorium and sit back into the velvet worn out chairs. Some kid actually finds an ice bucket of soda and passes a few out to all thirty of us. One guy chokes a bit on his drink and our sudden laughter surprises all of us.

We don't know each other, but it feels like we do. Like we've known each other for many many years.

Then a movie actually starts to play.

And for two hours, forty-three minutes and thirty two seconds, I actually forget about dying.

**9:44 pm -**

We all leave the theater collectively and walk out into the enormously silent town. It's vibrant not with life but with the remnants of life. It's like Christmas, our birthdays, our wedding days, and the last day of school all wrapped into one tiny city. And I love it.

Time seems to fly right over our heads as we crash into stores and waltz to mall music with the mannequins. We manage to climb up onto an old bookstore roof and a few of us try to tap dance on the ledges. The smell of burnt popcorn and soot fills the air in a romantic way and the moon never stops blinding the ground below. Streetlights sing and every empty house that night becomes full and loud and bright. And somewhere, far away, a piano piece starts to play.

Softly and quietly. Like a hurt dog in the middle of a sea...

**11:12 pm -**

The night breeze dances around us while the indigo murky waves of the sea hastily grab at the sand, only to slip back into the horizon. We're sitting side by side and everyone seems to want to bring each other closer to themselves. My face is sticky with cotton candy. We titter around and clink our vintage Coke bottles together under the moon.

And there it is again. That same piano melody. It's humming its tune out loud and I think everyone hears it now.

"Do you guys hear that?" I still ask. "It's kind of like...I don't even know. It's a piano piece I think. You guys hear that right?"

A girl a few kids down answers me, her head tilted to the stars. "I think it's Clair de Lune actually. From Debussy. Debu-e-ssy? Deb-uh-ssy- however you say it."

"Well it sounds nice."

“Yeah, yeah it does.”

“It’s a nice funeral song,” one guy remarks. He chuckles and throws his glass bottle down into the sand. It doesn’t break. It just sits there. And he starts laughing.

His laugh sounds like a fresh cut and soon enough we all start to laugh. We laugh horrendously loud and we eventually stand up, hold hands, and dance in a circle. My head becomes dizzy and delirious and yet my smile still remains plastered on my sticky winded face.

Our laughs start to melt into some sort of animalistic noise. I don’t recognize it but it kind of sounds like that piano piece. Clair de Lune. It’s only when I touch my face when it occurs to me that we’re crying.

I’m glad I’m not the only one. In fact, I’m not the only one at all. I’m everyone.

“Good evening my dearest children,” a thunderous voice sneaks into the night air and chimes in from all directions. We stop twirling and cluster together instinctively. “It’s 11:59 pm. and your time has expired. The countdown will start now. May you all take this as a lesson to realize how life isn’t about wasting time or partying but it’s about being a good adult. May you take these sins from this life and abolish it in every way possible in your next. Let there be light in your new life and let there be joy and happiness. Let the world be rid of aimless children like you and make way for new useful adults. For the time is now, my dear children, to grow up and-”

Someone yells a few obscenities at the mystery voice and everyone joins in. And me? I just keep crying and laughing. The girl to the right attacks me with a hug and we all hold hands and laugh together. Bracelets are jangling and the air is jammed full of hollers and sounds made from what we like to call “happy children”.

“Your time will be up in si-fifty seconds.” The voice has lost its thunder. “I suggest you all to sit down and think about what this means to-”

I don’t hear the rest because I don’t want to. The voice drowns and we twirl together. My eyes are blurred with tears but somehow I can see everything now. The waves have stopped and the voice is gone.

And we laugh and we cry because maybe

just maybe

this is what we wanted all along.