

Monday, February 24th

I've decided to start journaling again. I used to journal a lot, but then my life got uninteresting and journaling is time-consuming, but I've got nothing better to do now, so here we are.

I just got home from school. Everyone there is talking about this virus that's going around in China. I don't know what to think about it. They don't really know anything about it yet, just that it's sort of flu-like and somewhat contagious. They say young people aren't getting it though, so I'm not that scared. Then again, if anyone is going to get this mysterious illness, it's going to be me.

Still, I'm not worried. There are only a few cases in the US so far, and only one in New York. Besides, this seems like something the media is exaggerating so we all freak out. It's not the first time that's happened.

In other news, my parents said I might be able to travel to California for spring break! I hate beaches, but it'll be nice to get somewhere warm for a while. Hopefully my cough will be better by then.

I'll be able to see my cousin, who I haven't seen in a while. She'll be turning fifteen soon. Fifteen! She's getting so old. I remember when we were little, and we used to stay in my grandmother's attic and play with the old string puppets from the '50s.

Mom's friend Jackie is also going to have me pet sit again in the beginning of March. She owns a really pretty townhouse in Brooklyn and has three cats and a dog. The cats are super cute and the dog likes to cuddle, and they have a nice backyard for the pets to play.

On a completely different note, I think I'm finally getting caught up in my school work. I've been super sick lately. I've been absent from school for fifteen days so far this year because I've been sick, five of them last week. I was so gross. I couldn't even get out of bed to watch TV. I couldn't breathe and I couldn't think because everything hurt so much.

I finally went to the doctor and I tested positive for the flu. They gave me medicine for the flu. And then it got worse, so they gave me stronger medicine for the flu. And that medicine made me puke thirty minutes after I took it, so I spent most of my morning on the bathroom floor, because it was nice and cold down there and I never had to go too far to puke.

It's mostly better now, but I still have this annoying cough. Every time I exercise even the tiniest bit I'm thrown into a coughing fit. It's like something is stuck in my lungs, but it

never comes out. It happens way more when I wake up in the morning, and when I go to bed at night. I feel bad for waking my parents.

I'm getting tested for whooping cough tomorrow after school. Honestly, I hope I have it just so I can take some medicine and get this thing over with. I just want to hang out with people again and go outside. I was cooped up in my house for so long.. Jesus I can't take it anymore. I can't stand being inside for too long, I need social interaction.

Anyway, it's getting late. I'm going to try to write every day but I'm not very good with schedules.

~Astrid

Tuesday, February 25th

I went to the doctor's today. They tested me for whooping cough by pricking my finger. I've never liked needles, and I've always had to look away when they do that.

They said they'll get back to me by the end of the week. I doubt that. The doctor's office is lowkey horrible. Last time I got tested for Mono they didn't get back to me for two weeks only to tell me I *had* it, and that I should have taken care of myself earlier. I had to restrain myself from telling them to fuck off. It took me *three tries* to get them to test me, and the only reason they did at all was because Dad came with me and told the doctor to take me seriously.

Dad tells me I don't explain well enough. He says I "talk too much" and that means they don't take me seriously, because I don't show that I'm "actually in pain." Anyway, I did end up getting tested and I did end up having Mono.

I couldn't sleep last night because I kept coughing. It was like something was sitting on my chest because I couldn't breathe, even when I was just lying there on my back. It was awful. I just want this thing, whatever it is, to go away.

June's throwing a party this weekend. It's the first one she's thrown since December. They're usually fun. She lets people bring friends, and then I can talk to more people than just everyone who I see everyday. They get boring after a while, you know?

Anyway, she wants to make it fancy, so I'm thinking about buying that sparkly black dress I saw at H&M last week. It wasn't too expensive, and I just got my birthday money from Gram, so I can afford it. I'll have to hide it from Mom, though. She doesn't like when I spend my money on things like clothes.

I have to go now. Dinner's on the table and Mom is yelling. I think it's meatloaf tonight.

~Astrid

Friday, February 28th

Nothing much has happened for the past few days so I haven't had anything to write about. H&M were out of the dress I wanted so I ended up buying a similar one in blue.

There's been really nice weather lately, too. It's been remarkably warm for February, and sunny but not too sunny. A lot of wind, but that's okay.

Hazel told me today that she and Finn were going to break up. She thinks he cheated on her. I'm not surprised. He never struck me as a faithful kind of guy.

I haven't told anyone about this but I suppose I'll tell you. I have no reason not to. It's not like anyone will be reading this, right? But I will take this secret to the grave.

Finn was never faithful. We were at a party, and he kissed me. He had done it before, too, but that was before he and Hazel were a thing. I've had friends come to me and tell me they'd done something with him too, and *should they tell Hazel?* I don't know why I kept saying no.

And *god* I can't bear to even think about it anymore. I felt so bad saying no, because I should have told her a long time ago, but if one comes clean then I have to come clean too and Hazel is my best friend and I couldn't do that to her. And by then it wasn't about Hazel anyway.

But I do feel bad for her. She was really happy with Finn. I just hope she doesn't find out.

~Astrid

Saturday, Feb 29, 2020

I woke up just after 1130. I had a headache because I hadn't had any coffee yet. I texted my dad to bring me some coffee in bed and of course he said no and to get it myself. So I purposefully fell out of bed and walked into the kitchen. It sounds weird, but it's actually quite effective. Just keep rolling to the edge until you hit the cold floor and it'll definitely wake you up. So I made a triple espresso and poured it on ice. And now I'm just sitting at the kitchen island ingesting my first dose of caffeine for the day. I have no plans for the day. It's freezing outside and I really don't feel like dealing with that. Connor is busy all day playing football somewhere, but we're supposed to meet up at 6 for our date tonight. None of my friends are responding to me. They must be busy. Honestly it's kind of good, though, because most of my close friends are guys so all they want to do is sit around and play video games or go outside and play sports. They also suck at talking about anything important, not that I have that much serious stuff I need to talk about, it would just be nice to have that option, you know? Also Connor gets nervous sometimes, thinking that he has to compete with all these other guys or something. He doesn't admit to it often because I think it makes him feel embarrassed. He knows that my relationship with him is completely different than with my friends. My friends are sort of like my brother, so as my boyfriend he literally has nothing to worry about. He's asked me a few times why I don't have any close girl-friends. I guess I'm just a guy person. Girls don't seem to like me, anyways. I think maybe I'm not emotional or vulnerable enough for them. Oh well. It's kind of a stereotype that a girl's best friend should be a girl. I guess I'm defying the stereotype.

So I still have no idea what I'm gonna do until Connor comes to pick me up later. My parents decided to ride their bikes up to Central Park and visit the Met.

They really aren't that pretentious, I think they're worried that they aren't taking advantage of living in New York. Anyways, they did invite me, but I said no thank you. I think I'll just do what I usually do when I'm bored and over-caffeinated. I'm going to the gym.

I got back from the gym and took a long shower because I felt disgusting. I basically wore full spandex and I get the feeling that it doesn't breathe very well. I'm honestly so sick of my gym. Actually I'm pretty sure most gyms in the city would be exactly the same. There's always one person staring at themselves intensely in the mirror, another person yelling at their boss in their airpods while they do a couple bicep curls, and another person crying while their personal trainer yells at them. I swear, I'm not crazy. I genuinely see people like this most days I workout. My dream gym is outside. That would be amazing. But as far as I know, there aren't any outdoor gyms in New York City.

Connor showed up at 5:30 and I asked him why he was so early. He told me we needed to leave enough time to get to the restaurant. I said, "but it only takes 10 minutes to get there, we can take the A." But he insisted that we had to walk. Ugh. he knows I hate walking. He told me some garbage about how the train is for work and school purposes, not for dates. I rolled my eyes and realized that it was actually really sweet what he was doing. Still, probably unnecessary. We had a really nice dinner. He insisted that we walk home, too. I was freezing cold, but I didn't protest because he gave me his jacket. It was our school's football jacket with his name stitched on the back. He dropped me off at my apartment on the 32nd floor. I told him he could stay for a while, but he said he should probably go. I kissed him goodbye and then played my guitar for an hour or so. Now I'm just deciding if I'm gonna go to sleep or not. I kinda wanna just stay up and watch Netflix cause I mean it's not like I need to wake up early tomorrow.

Sunday, March 1st

June had her party this weekend. It was in her apartment on the Upper East Side. Her parents weren't home so we had the whole house to ourselves. There ended up being way more people there than June wanted because everyone kept bringing extra friends. At one point June's friend had to physically pick up a boy nobody knew and throw him out of her house.

It started hectic but nice. June had decorated her house in fairy lights which gave it a sort of prom-like feeling. Everyone was wearing fancy clothes, too. Some of the boys got full suits, some people just wore blazers, a lot of girls ended up wearing sparkly dresses. I found out that I'm outrageously bad at putting on other people's eyeliner. Ellie asked me to do hers, because I'm good at doing eyeliner on myself, and I really fucked up her eye. It's like braiding hair; I can braid other people's hair, but not my own.

Hazel drank too much, and I was the one who ended up having to help her. She was crying about Finn in between fits of puking, and I don't think I've ever seen anyone in a worse state. I sat with her, tied her hair up, and tried to keep her from dying. I thought she was going to pass out. I wasn't in the right state to help her if she did.

She told me she had lied before; she didn't break up with Finn because she found out he was cheating on her. No, *she* had cheated on *him*. But I wasn't allowed to tell Finn that, because he thinks she just "fell out of love," or something else cheesy like that.

I got home safely last night, somehow. The Uber driver was nice and let Ellie walk me to my door before driving her home. My dad was still awake when I got back, asked me how the party was, and told me to go to bed. I did just that.

The doctors called me back today. I do *not* have whooping cough. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. If I don't have whooping cough, then this cough that I have is just some lasting symptoms of the flu, right?

It doesn't matter. My cough is becoming less frequent and less painful; it only happens a few times a day now, instead of every ten minutes.

Still, it annoys me that it took them a week to get back to me. Even if I didn't end up having it, what if I *did*. Then I need to figure out how to get better. Giving me a week to get worse doesn't help anything.

It doesn't matter. Mom's running the news a lot to see if this illness is getting worse. I probably should be paying more attention, but nobody's panicking yet, so I'm not worried. I guess we'll see where all of this goes.

~Astrid

Sunday, March 1, 2020

I woke up having slept terribly because I couldn't stop thinking about the news I'm gonna hear today. My top choice for college is releasing their decisions today. If I don't get in, I'm gonna have to go to my second choice—which is technically my eighth choice because I didn't get into my 2nd through 7th choices. I don't really understand why, to be honest. I know colleges are super competitive now, but I'd be lying if I said I thought I would get rejected by this many schools

I don't want anybody else to be there with me when I open the application portal. Connor applied there as well. The school has a great football team so he spent weeks arguing with his strict parents who didn't like the idea of him going to school in Canada (and at a public university) instead of a fancy private school in the U.S. His family, as well as me, encouraged him to apply to U.S. schools, too. I think it's widely known that if he wants to play football, the U.S. is the place to be. He was really scared to apply to U.S. schools, though, and when I asked him why, he said he was sure he wasn't good enough. He also said it would be better for us to go to the same school, which made me worried because I obviously don't want him making some huge life decision because of me. But he insisted that he wanted this for himself, too, and that being at the same school as me would just be a bonus. I didn't push him anymore. We probably won't both get in anyways. It's only going to be a problem if he gets in and I don't because he's literally trying to go there for me, whether he admits it or not. But I'm refusing to think about that right now.

So Connor really wants to open our portals together so we can support each other when we find out. I lied and told him that my parents want me to open it with them. I think they probably do, so it's not *that* much of a lie. I want to open it on my own, though.

I checked a few times during the day and took a deep breath each time I opened the portal. Now that I think about it, it was probably one of the most stressful days of my life. The idea that the next big decision in my life has been made and I am left dangling in space waiting to hear it is actually kind of

insane. It's the simplest thing, and yet a yes or a no makes all the difference in the world, you know?

I didn't do much all day cause I was just on edge. I tried to distract myself by cleaning my room, re-organizing my closet, and playing my guitar. I called Jackson, who's weirdly a close friend of both me and Connor. We spent an hour or so half-listening to each other rant about the problems in our lives, and then I heard a ding on my computer at about 4pm. For a few minutes I literally just sat on the other side of my room. I don't even know what I was thinking about but I couldn't move closer to my computer. I knew what the email was before I even saw it: "Updated Application Status." I also completely forgot I was on the phone with Jackson (and I think he forgot as well) so when I remembered I just hung up on him. Oops. So when I finally opened the portal and read my fate, I learned that I got in!!!!!! OMG!! I got in!!! That's insane! I'm not going to lie, I did click in and out of the letter a few times because it shoots confetti all over the computer screen. wow. I'm actually so relieved because I spent so much time trying to assure myself that going to my backup school wouldn't be so bad, but omfg it would totally suck. Aklhhhhhhhhhhh. So I sat in my room just smiling. If anyone walked in they would have actually thought I was crazy. And then I remembered that if I heard back, Connor would have as well. I checked my phone for messages and saw only two from him. Only two? There's no way he got in and only told me with two messages. It's definitely sus. one said "hey" and the other said "I just heard, can you call me?"

way to bring it up, Connor, I'm not terrified at all to call him now. Also I'm like 99% sure this means he didn't get in. or he did get in and he for some reason thinks I didn't get in? Except that makes no sense he wouldn't assume that. So basically I'm pretty sure when I call him in a few minutes he's gonna tell me he didn't get in and that we have to figure out what to do with our relationship.

I was right! I called him and he told me right away that he didn't get in. It was super awkward when I told him I did. He pretended to be happy for me, or

maybe he was, but it just seemed like we were both too sad to be happy. So we talked for a little while at first but then the call got really quiet and we were basically just sitting in our rooms in silence, trying to decide what to do. we both avoided the word "breakup," but I'm sure we both thought it.

Monday, March 2, 2020

I don't really feel like writing much today. Last night was sucky, to say the least. Eventually Connor and I both fell asleep on our silent phone call. At one point he woke up and realized I was asleep on the phone, too, and he hung up and texted that we would talk tomorrow. Well it is tomorrow and I'm not ready to talk. Even worse, it's Monday which means we have school which means I'll have to talk to him in person. We've got a couple months left of school, then summer, and then we'll be in different parts of the continent. I looked it up, the time difference between us, assuming he's going to his 2nd choice school in California, is 2 hours. That's going to be awful. Not to mention, we won't be seeing each other during that time. We can't drive out for the weekend to see each other because it would take days to make that drive. We can't fly out to each other more than once or twice each because that costs too much money. Basically we've signed up for a long-distance relationship. Pretty sure I'm not built for that.

I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to approach my conversation with him. Should I follow my personal principles and just be straight forward to the point where it hurts? Or should I do what he would do and tip-toe around it until the very last minute? I can't decide, and I can't plan interactions. I'll have to wait and see how it comes out in the moment.

Tuesday, March 3rd

In the past two days, a lot of things with the virus have happened. It's taking over Europe now, like the number of cases has doubled in just a few days.

So far they've been saying that not many people are dying. I don't know how reliable every country is, but China says that their death rate is less than 1%. Italy says something similar, but maybe a bit more. I think they said 1%.

That doesn't feel like much to me, but I think it's more than I think it is. 1% of 1000 is 100 people. That's a *lot*.

But it's not particularly contagious, I don't think. That's what they're saying, at least.

That's all I hear about at school, though. There are 4 known cases in NYC, but they're being treated.

That's all anyone talks about at lunch though. Whenever I sit down, everyone around me is talking about this virus. They don't seem particularly worried, just interested. I mean, how's this gonna go? It hasn't happened in a long time. I don't think anyone is prepared for this if it turns into a pandemic or something.

There are doctors on the news saying they have everything under control. They have to, right? But I feel like that's what all the movies say, and then everything gets out of control fast.

I don't know. I guess I'll just see where this goes.

On a different note, school is going okay. I'm caught up in all my classes. I met with my math teacher after school today to make sure I know everything and he seemed impressed with how fast I caught up.

I finished my essay for lit and all the rest of my homework. I'm so ready to be done with school.

Mom's friend has been texting me about house sitting. She and her husband are still going to Toronto despite all this stuff that's going down. They said they stocked up on gloves and face masks for the trip to make sure they don't get infected on the plane. Once again, I don't even know what to think of that.

I've been to their house once, and it's super nice. They've got a three-story brownstone on Barrow, with its own backyard and balcony and everything. They have a super strict schedule for the animals, but their apartment is a walk away from school instead of a subway ride, so I'll have more time to walk the dog and everything.

Part of me can't wait. It'll be fun to be on my own, to live in my own house and take care of my own life, even if it is just for one week.

June says she's going to sleep over a few nights that week. She invites herself over a lot, but I'm okay with that. I don't know how I'd live without June. We've been best friends since middle school, when she was the new kid, with pink braces and messy hair and I was the old one. That was back when I only wore leggings and spaghetti strap tops.

I'll probably invite some others over, too. Maybe just for one night. I wouldn't dare ruin the house, but I'd be crazy not to take advantage of it, wouldn't I?

~Astrid

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

So yesterday Connor and I talked for all of lunch. We went outside and sat at my favourite café. The first few minutes were silent and then my instinct kicked in and I told him we needed to figure this out. I explained all my concerns, told him that I loved him so much, but that we needed to consider our options. I could see the pain in his eyes, although most of the time his eyes aimed at the ground. I realized I'd been talking for nearly ten minutes without interruption so I paused and asked him what he thought. I then listened to him explain every reason why we should stay together, how long-distance relationships are evidence of a strong and true connection and that we are both capable of making it work. So he clearly wanted to stay together and try long distance. I don't think that's what I want, but I guess there's no harm in trying. IDK!! I'm pretty sure he could tell I wasn't too hot on the idea. It's not like I don't want to be together, I just don't know if long distance is the kinda thing I could handle. Wouldn't a long-distance breakup, potentially after someone has cheated, be more painful than a peaceful breakup now or in a few months? Why wait for something bad to happen, for one of us to fall victim to the dreaded 4,000 miles? I obviously don't want to end our relationship, I just think if we think about it practically, we can minimize the pain by ending it now rather than after we know it can't work any longer. I felt like maybe this moment at the café was not the time to try and prove these points. He looked broken enough already. He's the one who got rejected from the university, not me. He has that additional pain. I'm going to give him some time to deal with it before I bombard him with my opinions on why we should break up. Jeez. This is not what I wanted during my senior year. Also I sound like a terrible person. If I was reading a book or watching a tv show with somebody doing exactly what I'm doing I'd wanna throw something through a window.

At the same time, it's kind of a relief that he's not going to be following me to college. Oops that doesn't sound very good. It's just that he used to tell me going there wasn't just for me, but I was so worried that if anything happened and we broke up he would resent me. There's no easy answer in

this situation, but I still think the most smart choice would be to end it soon.
we'll see.

wednesday, March 4, 2020

School today totally sucked. I'm in my last few months of high school and for some reason now is the time I'm doing really well in my classes. I'm not saying I did poorly before, but I was always kind of average. For some reason, now, when my grades basically don't matter at all, I'm getting all A's. Why couldn't it have been like this last year when I was spending eight hours a week practicing for the SAT. Apparently all of my friends are just about failing all of their classes, but they're proud of it. And I'm the weird one for doing well. Oh well. I'm not the type of person to shove my work in people's faces. I'm also not the type of person to attack someone for not doing their work. They are choosing not to, and they have to honor that decision even if they regret it later on. And now I sound like some freak who thinks they're better than everyone else, and that I've got everything figured out. I haven't. I just seem to be better at solving the logistical challenges in life than some people.

Also I can't seem to figure out how much my parents care about my grades. I've never been able to figure it out. Sometimes I think I've figured it out and then they go and do something that shuts down my hypothesis. My friends' parents either super care or super don't care about what their grades are. Mine are somewhere in the middle I guess. I could probably just ask them and find out, but that seems like a lot of effort. And as soon as it gets anywhere close to personal they'd shut down. The good thing is that I've made it this far with average grades and now I'm doing better than ever before—how could they be anything but happy about that? I'm fine, it's all good.

Thursday, March 5, 2020

Today was a pretty good day. My coffee was extra yummy, so I had to go back for more at lunch. My class schedule was good today because I had music and french, and no math. Most Thursday lunches, Connor hangs out with the group of his friends from middle school. They don't really hang out outside of school because they aren't super close anymore, but a while ago they decided to have lunch on Thursdays. One of the kids in the group has mono so they decided to cancel it today. This meant I didn't need to beg Jackson or Ben to go get coffee with me because Connor just assumed that if he didn't have plans, we'd do something together.

I don't love that assumption. Yes, of course I want to spend time with my boyfriend, but I don't like the idea of him thinking I'm nothing but a lonely loser without him. Whenever I say I want to do something with my friends, he invites himself along because they are his friends, too. They were my friends first, though! I never say that because that's the kind of thing Lina would say. Lina, the perfectly pretty, blond goddess who dumbed herself down enough to be liked by every guy in school, including Connor. I rarely think about her. I like to think I'm better than that. Plus, when I moved to New York Connor broke up with her to be with me. Two and a half years later and were still so close. He's the perfect boyfriend. When we first got together he told me that the reason he liked me so much was because I didn't remind him of Lina and all the other girls like her. He told me I was unique. I really thought it was a compliment at the time. Now I'm not so sure.

The only bad part of my day was when Steven wouldn't shut up about some disease in China. He said there was an outbreak and that it was only a matter of time before it spread here. He called it the "Black Death Part 2". If more people seemed as concerned as him maybe I would have cared more, but while Steven was talking the rest of us just kinda rolled our eyes. I'm guessing my parents know about it and will bring it up at dinner, so I'm just going to wait until then to talk about it.

Sunday, March 8th

I just arrived at the Barrow house! It's *beautiful*. The outside is really pretty brownstone with plants outside and a big tree. They've got a bird feeder hanging from one of the branches, which I have to fill every day.

The one thing I'll say, though, is that these people are prepared for an apocalypse. There are three doors to get into the first floor; a gate, a main door, and a second main door. Each has two locks with a key each. I had to buy a whole new lanyard for all the keys I suddenly have.

They have an extra door lock for each door. You know how in movies when they're trying to keep someone out of a room, they shove a chair under the door? It's like that, but it's *made* for that specifically. Like a pole to keep the people out.

The first floor is the kitchen, and there are all the pet bowls down there. The kitchen is very industrial, with metal floors and a *huge* fridge.

I went down to the basement today to empty the litter boxes. It's a *bunker* down there. The door is lifted up from the floor, like the opposite of an attic door, and it's like 100 pounds and tied to the stairs with three thick ropes. I don't know *what* they do here.

Anyway, the basement is full of boxes and the floor is coated in cat litter. The second floor is the living room, the third are the bedrooms. I picked the second bedroom. It has a huge king bed and it's own balcony and a walk-in closet. It's the guest room, according to Jackie (Mom's friend), but it's so much nicer than the master.

I decided just to leave my suitcase open and not unpack. There's no point, right? I'm only going to be here for a week. I'm not very messy anyway.

I'll attach pictures of the pets here, because they're super cute. The cats are named Sock and Meow. Sock is a little tabby cat and Meow is a main coon. They're both super friendly, and Meow likes to sit on my lap. Sock just meows a lot (which is ironic, I guess) especially when he's hungry. Jackie says Sock likes to sleep on her feet at night, like a little foot warmer.

The dog's name is Gracie, and she's the cutest. She's a big baby, like a guard dog, but sweeter than anything. She's super fluffy and she likes kisses and she likes cuddles and she's very jumpy when I told her it was Walk Time.

There's a very big plant on the dining room table. Jackie said it's a very rare plant, and I need to water it regularly. It's big and very pretty. The whole upper levels of the house give me a very "regal" feeling.

I made mac and cheese for dinner tonight. I have a feeling I'll be eating a lot of that in the next week.

I'm going to feed the pets tonight, and go to bed. I have school tomorrow, so I shouldn't go to bed too late.

~Astrid

Monday, March 9, 2020

This weekend was really nice. Connor and I were together the whole time. My parents went out of town to some yoga retreat in the Catskills. And I was right, by the way—they did bring up the disease at dinner a few nights ago, and they agree with Steven. It actually seems like more than just Steven and my parents think that. I've done some reading online and the numbers in China are insane, and growing fast. Doctors can't find a cure. I've actually seen a few people on the subway wearing masks. Seems a bit much to me, but I guess better safe than sorry.

Anyways, Connor and I had my apartment to ourselves which was great. Normally we watch movies in my closet of a bedroom because my mom is watching hockey or something in the living room. We spent most of Saturday shopping and walking around the city. I really wanted to sit in the grass along the Hudson River, but Connor was sure I'd be too cold. He knows I hate the cold. Instead we went to stores and tried on crazy clothes that we would never buy. It was a cute and perfect weekend. I'm not gonna go into too much detail about it, thought. It might sound lame and cheesy, but I don't think it deserves to be chalked down to a few words in a journal. I wouldn't want people to be able to experience that weekend just by reading a few short paragraphs—it's not that easy.

Now it's Monday and they're talking about the disease even more at school. We actually had an assembly today. It's called Covid-19 and basically what I gathered from the assembly is that doctors have no idea what to do about it. It spreads super fast so I guess people are supposed to try and keep their distance. I'm so happy I live in New York! It's great when you need space. Anyways, I really hope it doesn't ruin all the things I'm looking forward to this year: spring break, graduation, prom. I can't imagine a senior year without prom and grad, there's no way. And I swear if they make us do it online I'd probably have to protest and just not show up.

Monday, March 9th

It's been a long day. I woke up at 6:30, which was *awful* because I couldn't sleep last night. My cough has gotten a lot better, but my chest still hurts sometimes and makes it hard to sleep.

I walked Gracie after I got dressed, and she was super happy the entire time, and almost yanked my arm off when she saw another dog. Thankfully she's super sweet, and just licks everyone she sees.

I made friends with a boy down the street. His name is Hugo and he seems really nice. He's twenty and he's going to NYU, and he has a little grey shar pei puppy named Ashe. The puppy is the cutest thing ever and Gracie almost drowned her in kisses. Hugo said Ashe was only a few months old, and she was still getting used to seeing other dogs, which is why she was so excited all the time.

I saw him go into a house a few doors down from mine. I don't know how he lives in such a fancy house when he's just a college kid. Maybe he still lives with his parents?

Anyway, after walking Gracie I fed the cats and scooped their poop, then walked to school. It's so nice to be able to walk to school! I could leave so late and still get to school with time to spare!

We had an assembly in school today about the pandemic. Basically, it seems to be a lot worse than what everyone keeps saying it is. Other countries have apparently been hiding the real death toll and the government is worrying about the citizens. They played a video of the president giving a speech. He seemed really worried, more worried than I was expecting. He says he's probably going to lock down the country soon.

Thomas, who recently got back from a trip to Atlanta to visit his cousins, told me the airports were deserted and anyone who was there stayed ten feet away from him and stared at him with a very condescending look whenever he seemed like he was getting too close.

Needless to say, I'm not going to California for spring break anymore.

But what should we even do? I don't even know what to expect from all of this. It's not like this has happened before. And the year I graduate? That sucks.

Speaking of graduating, colleges are a thing. I've applied to a bunch. I hope I get into UPenn. I visited last spring break and it was my favorite, right after Columbia, but I didn't get in when I applied ED. I think I find out where I get in within the next month or so.

I went to the grocery store after school. I bought a ton of snack food and a lot of pasta, because it's easy to make. I really stocked up; I bought way more than I meant to when I went in. At least I won't have to go to the store again for a while.

Hazel and June came over today. We sat on the couch and ate cheetos and watched a movie. Hazel doesn't remember telling me anything at June's party, and I'm not going to remind her. Finn hasn't come near me either, and I'm not mad.

I would've liked Hazel or June to stay the night, just because the house gets lonely when it's dark, but they had to go home and do homework. I fed the cats and walked Gracie again. It started raining, too, which just made everything darker and more ominous. I had barely finished Gracie's walk when the thunderstorm started, and then she was jumpy and scared. I've spent the night doing homework in my bed, and all the animals spent the night curled at my feet. None of them seem to like thunderstorms. I find them kind of comforting, but I don't really know why.

Anyway, I should sleep now. It's really late, and I have no ability to make myself go to bed without my parents sticking their head in and yelling at me or scaring me off. But I'll try.

~Astrid

Tuesday, March 10, 2020

Most mornings my dad walks to school with me because his office is only a few blocks past the school. My favourite café is right in the same area so we usually stop there as well. This morning I walked alone because my dad had to go into the office early for a meeting. The walk is about 35 minutes so I needed some good music. I wasted about 7 walking minutes deciding between Fleetwood Mac, Led Zeppelin, the Doors, and the Rolling Stones. How am I supposed to choose between these legends? I clicked on the Doors and pressed 'shuffle,' but after 30 seconds of "Light My Fire" I switched to Fleetwood Mac. I think Fleetwood Mac is probably one of the greatest bands of all time, without a doubt, but I do have one controversial opinion... I like the Dixie Chicks' version of "Landslide" more than the original. There's just something about the hillbilly sound that makes it even better. Plus, I love Stevie Nicks and her unique off-key rasp, but I think this is one of the songs where it would have been best for Christine McVie to step in. I can't believe I said that, I would definitely get attacked for that.

Anyways, when "Landslide" came on I skipped it as usual and listened to "Second Hand News" instead. Speaking of news, I was prepared for another school assembly about this virus because the numbers are booming in the U.S. I think it's getting really serious, and we're definitely going to be way behind on the procedures of how to prevent the spread and whatnot.

Tuesday, March 10th

Some of the high schools closed today. They're starting to require people to wear masks and plastic gloves everywhere.

Jackie texted me and told me she and her husband might not be able to come home anytime soon. They're trying to get a flight as soon as they can, but it doesn't look like they're going to be able to.

She also said she left some masks in one of her bathroom cupboards for me, just in case. She does give me the "prepared for anything" vibe, with the door jam and the seven thousand keys to get into the house.

I found the masks, so I've been wearing one every time I go outside, but honestly I don't even know how this thing spreads. The government doesn't even know. We know it's airborne, but not how easily it spreads.

Several of my classmates have started facetimeing into school, because their parents are immunocompromised or something. I'm lucky I don't live with my dad right now. He smokes a lot, and I'm sure this virus affects him worse. It's supposed to affect people who can't breathe well a lot more seriously.

I think my school is going to close soon. For now, I'm just going to act like everything is normal until it does. I don't think I can really do anything else.

~Astrid

wednesday, March 11, 2020

This is supposed to be the last week of school before spring break, and today things got weird. It started in the morning while I was having breakfast at home and my mom told me I should try to bring all of my things home from school today. She said she thinks school will close before the end of the week, that public schools are already closing, and that I should bring my things home in case this happens. Then I got to school and they made us download this app on our laptops that's basically a less cool version of Slack. Apparently in case school gets cancelled for a bit we're going to have to attend classes remotely using this app, Zoom. I downloaded it and signed up, but assured myself we wouldn't get to the point of using that so when they asked us to test it out, I lied and said it worked well. Then the worst part is that my friends started getting super sad because somebody's parents said that school will probably stay closed for a while after spring break. This is already so weird and I have a feeling it's only getting weirder.

Thursday, March 12, 2020

When I stop at my favourite café every morning I bring my HydroFlask to put my coffee in. Once I got in the habit of going there every day, I decided it would be better to get a reusable mug. Plus, now I get to drink my coffee throughout the day rather than chugging it right before bio. But this morning I got to the café and set the HydroFlask down on the counter, and saw a sad look on the barista's face. She pointed to a piece of cardboard near the drink menu that said "to avoid exposure to Covid-19, we are no longer accepting personal beverage receptacles". Damn, that sucks. Oh well, I got my coffee in a clear plastic cup with no straw, and I made sure to recycle it later.

School ended early today because teachers wanted kids to avoid riding the train when it was super busy. I walked home, so this didn't have any affect on me, but I'm not complaining. I'm going home to Palm Springs tomorrow and I still need to pack. I didn't get lunch today because they were serving some sort of chicken and the vegetarian option was a squash and mushroom soup. Gross. No way I was going to eat that. But by the time I was walking home I was really hungry and decided to stop at Chipotle. For some reason all the people who work there are so angry and seem like they absolutely hate their jobs. I get it, it's probably not too interesting, but if you're gonna be there you'd better at least try a little bit. I just mean, put 10% effort into it, that's all. I was carrying my Chipotle bowl home with me but I stopped at the deli on the corner of my block to get an iced tea. They sell them at chipotle but they're twice as expensive. When I came out of the deli I pulled a small folded piece of paper out of my bag and taped it to the side of a street sign. Then I went home.

So this might sound super weird, but I feel like it's actually the perfect thing for what's going on right now. Especially if we really do get locked inside away from everyone. Connor thinks it's a terrible idea, in fact we actually got into a fight about it because he told me that I'm not careful enough and then I told him he could maybe loosen up a bit. Things got a little heated. All I did was

write my Palm Springs address on a piece of paper so that some stranger would pick it up and do the old fashioned way of communication: letter writing. I just think if everyone is stuck in their homes for the next little while it couldn't hurt to have someone new to talk to. The risk is that nobody picks it up, but I'm willing to take that risk. Connor thinks somebody is going to pick it up, somehow get to Palm Springs, and then break into my house and kill me or something. This is what really made me mad. Yes, sure, it's possible, but is it likely? No. Who on earth would do that during a global pandemic. It's literally stupid I don't know why he always has to think of the negative stuff or immediately jump past an enjoyable moment and straight to reality. Just enjoy the good things.

Anyways, the note I left said:

Hello Correspondent,
we're all going to be bored during the quarantine.
I'm leaving for Palm Springs tomorrow. Send me a letter there :

3 Excalibur Ct.
Rancho Mirage, CA
United States, 92270

Talk to you soon.
-Natalie

I think it's a cute idea, nothing to be worried about. And I decorated the note with some drawings of flowers. It looks pretty. Hopefully someone will walk by and see the little burst of color, pick it up and write me a letter.

Friday, March 13th

The president locked down the country this morning, and put everyone under quarantine. I was supposed to have school today, but at 6am this morning I got an email from the principal saying that school was closing. I'm lucky spring break starts soon; I don't have to do online school yet.

It's starting to get really bad. I went outside to walk Gracie today and saw three ambulances pass. One was picking up a person from a house a few blocks away and I saw them carry a teenage girl out on a stretcher. She was probably a few years younger than me, and she looked so sick her skin was almost grey. I haven't seen anyone with it before, only heard about what it was like. And even that has never been in detail. It was like time stopped when they loaded her into the ambulance. The paramedics were wearing full hazmat suits and one of them told me to back up.

Gracie started barking like she had seen the devil himself. She was pulling at her leash so hard she almost ripped my arm off, and I had to physically hold her back from running at the stretcher.

Behind them a whole crowd of paramedics in hazmat suits exited the building, with four more stretchers. All of them were covered in white sheets.

It was horrible. I couldn't bring myself to look away. All the people in the house had caught the virus and everyone except for that girl had died. There was blood seeping through one of the sheets.

They packed up the ambulance. One of the paramedics told me to go home. She looked young through her hazmat, and I felt really bad for her to have to still do this work.

I got Gracie home really quickly after that. I don't want to go outside anymore. I don't want to get this thing. I don't want to die.

~Astrid

Friday, March 13, 2020

So I woke up at 10am today for my flight to Palm Springs. I packed last night so I let myself sleep in as long as I could before having to rush to get ready. I'm a bit worried about the travel honestly, since it seems like such a perfect way for the disease to spread. Think about all the things you have to touch, all the encounters with other people, and just generally how many people there are and how close to them you tend to be.

The cab is the first scary bit of travel. Especially since my dad thought it would be a good idea to tell me about this cab driver who had the virus and drove like a hundred people around, probably infecting all of them. So now we're in the cab, and I'm pleasantly surprised by the smell of disinfectant spray and a sticker on the window that says "this cab has been disinfected". It seems kind of apocalyptic but also good, so I took a quick photo and posted it on my snapchat story. Some people are responding saying "that's so scary!" but my first reaction was that it was a small glimmer of hope. At least it makes me feel better about traveling.

When we got to the airport I wiped down our suitcases with wetwipes and we checked in and went through security. I felt strange the whole time, just like it wasn't right to be there. Once we got through security, we bought some snacks for the flight. The airport was noticeably less busy than usual, but it still didn't look like there was a global pandemic going on. We arrived at the airport almost two and a half hours early because my dad hates travel and is afraid of missing flights.

Now that I think about it, this was probably a terrible idea, but my dad wanted to look in the perfume and cologne store. We were there for about 15 minutes picking up all of the tempting bottles and spraying them onto the small pieces of cardstock. I thought nothing of it in the moment, but it really was a stupid thing to do. What the hell were we thinking! Then, another stupid choice, we went to a surf clothing store because my dad forgot to pack a hat. Stupid!

The plane is empty. Again, this is a good thing. My dad and I have a whole row to ourselves. I'm in the window seat, and he's in the aisle. Now that I'm on the plane I'm surprisingly more relaxed than I've been since this whole thing started. I'm realizing that it was New York that was stressing me out so much (no offense New York). For now, I'm still planning on going back in two weeks, at the end of spring break, but my mom told me to expect to be here longer. Nobody knows anything right now, so I just have to wait and see how things are later on. I have barely given any thought to the fact that if this thing is really bad, I might not have graduation or prom or any of the fun senior things. I can't and won't think about this until I have to. Anyways, the idea of getting out of New York is great, and I'm so close.

Plus, if I'm gonna be banned from going out and doing things, I may as well do it in a place with a backyard so I can at least get some fresh air and a tan.

When we walked into the luggage claim room to get our bags and I saw my mom standing there, I was so relieved. We got to the house and unpacked and it was a pretty decent night.

Saturday, March 14th

I called my mom today. She said that her job has her working from home and my dad is teaching over Zoom. Neither of them are leaving the house, either, because of my dad. They're getting groceries delivered, and we have a big stock of pasta and stuff in our cupboards, so they won't have to go out for a while.

Still, I think they'll drive each other crazy eventually.

I did figure out how to get Zoom on the TV though, so I'm gonna zoom one of my friends while I do other stuff in the living room. I think that'll help a lot. It's really driving me crazy being alone all the time.

It was Emma's birthday today, too. We all got together on zoom and she had a cake and we sang her happy birthday. June figured out how to do a Netflix party, and we all watched a *Terminator* movie. I made some brownies for myself to eat for Emma's birthday. They were really good.

I have the news on whenever I can. They closed the Manhattan tunnels today, because cars were piling up and everything was jammed and it wasn't worth it, I guess.

Death rates are coming out all over the world. In Italy, almost a third of the people have died. In India, it's almost half.

This feels apocalyptic. I don't know what to do.

~Astrid

Saturday, March 14, 2020

I woke up at 1pm in one of the most comfortable beds ever. I think it's just some crappy thing from IKEA, a.k.a my favourite store, but I could probably stay in here all day if it weren't for the backyard. I'm drinking some delicious iced coffee now and in a few minutes I'm gonna put my bathing suit on and tan in the backyard.

It's only been a few days since I've seen Connor, but I miss him today so wanna put one of his playlists while I tan. My options are: a playlist with his favourite songs, one with songs that we both love, one with songs that remind me of him, one that he made especially for me. I think I'm gonna listen to the one he made. Those songs make me feel closest to him.

- ★ "Two Princes" by the Spin Doctors
- ★ "Come out and Play" by The Offspring
- ★ "Dani California" by the Red Hot Chili Peppers
- ★ "Crash Into Me" by Dave Matthews Band
- ★ "Alive" by Pearl Jam
- ~~★ "Bullet with Butterfly wings" by Smashing Pumpkins~~
- ★ "No Rain" by Blind Melon

Those are some of my favourite songs on that playlist, except for "Bullet with Butterfly wings". I can't stress how much I hate Smashing Pumpkins. The guy's voice is just awful, it hurts my ears. I tried to like it, I really did, because Connor loves them. I gave up pretty early.

My music taste is much broader than his. He likes hard rock, 90s stuff (like what he put in my playlist), and more current alt music. I like all but the last kind. I like rock, older alt, new wave, some "pop" from like the 70s or 80s, sometimes I'll listen to disco—although basically just the Saturday Night Fever soundtrack—or current music. I don't even know which genres the new stuff I like fits in. My all time favourite genre is probably classic rock. Zeppelin is too good, the Doors are so relaxing, and Fleetwood Mac always puts me in some kind of mood.

Sunday, March 15th

I had to go out today to get dog food. Jackie warned me that I might run out a while ago, so I went to the store and bought as much as I could, as well as a bunch of food. Canned food and pasta. Lots of canned food and pasta.

I expected New York to freak out, like all the movies. But everyone's been weirdly... nice. People are giving money to the few homeless people left on the street, and there are even videos going viral of people helping the sick all over the world. Donating food, toilet paper, and masks. It's like everything is going to shit, and people are becoming nice. For now.

I've decided not to leave the house. I'm too scared. If anyone is going to get sick, it's going to be me, and I don't want to risk it. I've got enough food (human and animal) in here to last me a while and I've got the dog and cats to keep me company.

On the way back from the store, the streets were deserted. I was the only one outside for the entire walk home. It felt very apocalyptic but almost peaceful. Like I was the only one left in the world.

Then seven ambulances passed me, and it felt like that frozen time shattered into a million little pieces and the world lit up in red and blue lights and I remembered where I was and what was happening. I watched the ambulances pass, like a line of hearses. I wondered if they were going somewhere, or coming from somewhere. Were they full of dead bodies, or about to be?

And then they disappeared around the corner, and I was left in the deafening silence again.

I hate it. I want to go back to the time when the city streets were filled with people and voices. I miss what makes New York City.

I found a note taped to the corner of Barrow and Bedford. It says:

Hello Correspondent,

We're all going to be bored during the quarantine.

I'm leaving for Palm Springs tomorrow. Send me a letter there :

3 Excalibur Ct.

Rancho Mirage, CA

United States, 92270

Talk to you soon.

-Natalie

That's so cool. It's such a good idea to leave a note. I hope she got to California safely. I hope she and her family are healthy and safe. I hope a lot of things.

I've been writing this on the balcony off my bedroom, because it's a really warm day and it's the nicest place to sit outside. Guess who I can see from here?

Hugo! He lives two houses down and he also has an adjacent balcony. He called out to me while I was writing my journal to say hi. He asked me how I was doing with all of this. I told him the truth; it's scaring me. There are so many people dying, and we're only two days into quarantine. How did it get so bad so quickly?

I sat for a while and talked to Hugo. The house in between ours seems abandoned already, but no ambulances have pulled up on this block yet. Maybe because everyone here is rich enough to have whole pantries full of food and don't have to leave the house. Whatever it is, I hope they're not dead in there.

I'm having a Zoom dinner with some friends tonight. Eating alone is the saddest part, so I try not to.

~Astrid

Sunday, March 15, 2020

I just checked the mail for a letter from New York but there was nothing there. I honestly don't know if anyone will respond. I didn't realize it until it was too late, but I probably posted the note wrong. Someone would have to open it to see the note and address inside. Maybe it was a stupid idea. Also, letters are going to take so long to send. I should have just written my email or something cause it's way more convenient.

At the same time, though, these times are weird and unusual, and in the 21st century, so is letter writing, so it kind of makes sense. Plus, sitting down to read and write a letter takes up much more time and effort than sending a quick text, and time is exactly what we all have a lot of.

So I guess I still hope someone writes me something. I'm trying not to have expectations, though. I mean maybe I'll get a letter from a famous person, or from some banker, or a taxi driver, or a little girl, or a grandpa. Who knows. If I let myself have expectations, though, I'll be setting myself up for disappointment.

It's kind of strange for me in terms of my social life right now. I miss Connor, but things are still a little tense between us after hearing that he didn't get into Western. Our Facetimes usually peter out after half an hour or so now. Partly because we don't have all that much to talk about since we're stuck in our homes, but also because things just aren't the same now.

My friends are all major flakes. Sometimes if I'm bored and lonely I'll ask one of them to Facetime. They'll say, sure, but let's do it later so that the rest of the boys can join. I've been on one of these calls so far, and I was pretty unimpressed. I realized that these guys—my best friends—are no fun if we aren't physically together, in the same room. There's something about reducing them to just a couple voices that just makes it **boring**.

I was complaining to my dad that I was bored and he told me that I should contact some of my old friends from before we moved to the city. I said okay because I didn't want to have to prove to him that I don't have any friends here anymore. He told me that lots of kids in suburban places are driving out to meet their friends in empty parking lots and stuff. Then they'll all

park in a circle, with about 6 feet's distance in between each car, and they'll pop the trunks open. They all bring their own food and drinks and sit in the trunks hanging out. That's what my dad wants me to do with my old friends. Luckily, I learned how to drive last summer when we were in winnipeg visiting some family. So I guess it would be possible to do this. Oh, except for the fact that I'd be sitting in a completely empty parking lot by myself because I do not have any friends here anymore. When I moved, the few friends I did have were pretty upset. Actually, they were angry. I'm not entirely sure why—it wasn't like I had much control over the situation, but I guess we were pretty young so logic was out of the question.

My closest friend's name was Belinda. To be completely honest, I only really started talking to her because I thought it was so cool she was named after Belinda Carlisle, a new wave queen. That was probably a sign that our relationship wasn't gonna be that great. It's not that we didn't get along, because we did. It was more that we didn't understand each other.

She didn't understand why I had dual citizenship. She didn't understand why my grandma lived with my and my parents. When my grandma died and we decided to move to New York, she didn't understand that either. There were smaller things, too that she didn't understand. Like the fact that she was my only girl friend (friend that was a girl). She didn't understand why I was friends with all the boys, but never into them. She went through about five boyfriends from 8th to 9th grade alone. I went through zero.

Some of these things I didn't quite understand myself, but I at least accepted them and moved on. She couldn't do that. It was like every little thing she didn't like about my life, she would judge me for and bring it up when I was weakest.

In all honesty, I think my relationship with her kind of scarred me in terms of having close girl friends. I'm not saying I'm opposed to it—it's just not something I'm specifically looking for.

But aside from her, all my friends were idiots who would sneak out at lunch to smoke weed and have late night jam sessions. Don't get me wrong, being in that group was a lot of fun, but it was not productive. I guess I've sort

of had to give myself the advice that people typically get from friends, all my life.

Anyways, damn that was a rant. I guess that's what journals are for, though.

Monday, March 16th:

I fell asleep on the couch last night. I was watching the news all night.

They closed the bridges last night. They were so overpacked since the tunnels closed. A lot of people were trying to get out, and apparently the roads were gridlocked and getting everyone off the bridge took an entire day. Everyone on the Manhattan side was stuck here. Everyone on the other side was free to go. That doesn't feel fair, but I guess that's what quarantine is all about. The only things that can go in and out are food trucks and mail trucks. That's it.

So I'm stuck here now. I wasn't going anywhere anyway, but I'm stuck here, and there's something about being stuck on an island with 1.5 million people and not being able to leave. It's like being in a locked room.

I think 1.5 is too much now, though. A lot of them are dead, and a lot of them are gone. Sometimes I sit by the window and watch the people out there. There's only one or two every day, and you can never tell what they look like because they're so covered up.

Jackie called me today. The borders are locked down tight so she's not coming home anytime soon. She was really desperate about the animals, and I told her not to worry. I can't leave the house anyway, so I don't have anywhere to go.

I finally called my parents today. They're cooped in our tiny apartment. I asked them if they wanted to come here, because it's definitely bigger and more spacious and would probably make them feel less stuck, but they're too worried to even make the journey over. My dad's coughing more. I could hear him over the phone before he even talked to me. He won't stop smoking, though. Even now. He says "it's not worth it" because he's already a ticking time bomb.

My mom told him to "shut the fuck up" and I can't say I blame her. I've never heard my mom so worried. It's sort of weird.

Anyway, I wrote a letter to Natalie today, and I just mailed it. Fortunately, the mailbox is right outside my house, so all I have to do is put on some gloves and a mask and dash outside and back in again. Mail is still running well, which is good, because nothing else seems to be.

I wrote a lot about myself. Maybe I'm just so desperate to talk to people that I spill everything right away. I hope that doesn't put her off. I know a lot of people tell me I say too much too fast. Apparently I'm "really open" and don't really care who knows things about me.

Some people say they like that about me. Some people don't. I hope Natalie is one of the ones who does.

I'm getting so tired of hearing the death rates every day. We've passed 150 in NYC already. It takes a few days to set in, but from what I hear, if you get it you're very likely to die. Unless you're lucky. June's uncle had it, and he just had cold symptoms. He got it from his wife, who coughed up blood and died two days after she started showing symptoms. Both of them were healthy young adults.

So I guess it's just luck

And that's terrifying. I'm not known to be a very lucky person.

~Astrid

Monday, March 16, 2020

Lots of people from my highschool are updating their Instagram bios with the college or university they're going to. I was actually really looking forward to this because there's just something about putting it out there that makes it so official and real. But I'm just now realizing how lame this is in Canada. I have some friends there, or "friends" that I have on social media. I do actually have some friends there that I've met on vacation, and so I've become social media friends with my real friends' friends, and their friends, and their friends. So I follow a lot of Canadians on social media, of ranging ages, but when I realized it was time for me to put "western U" in my bio, I went to check other peoples'. It seemed that most if not all of my friends in New York, even here in Cali, have posted their school in their bio. But I haven't seen a single one for any of the Canadians. I guess this was the first clear example of how college-driven the United States is.

I started thinking about the recent conversations with my Canadian friends compared to the American ones. I realized I actually had no idea where most of my Canadian friends were going to college because it doesn't come up in conversation! It's not a thing there to ask someone where they're going to college unless there's specific context for it. That's weird. Or is it? Maybe the U.S. is the weird one, making college and university a constant thought on the mind. It can definitely drive a kid crazy.

Anyways, this Canadian/American college comparison I've been making is probably crazy, but I just think it's worth thinking about. And my point in thinking about it in the first place was to find out if it was a thing in Canada to post your college name in your Instagram bio. It apparently is not. So I guess I won't post it. I don't want to stand out too much.

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

I do not know what I'd do without my beloved backyard. I could have been in New York right now; unable to leave my apartment because there are too many risks of coming into contact with the virus. Can't take the elevator, but also can't open the door to the stairs. That's one of the most simple things that I normally wouldn't even think about, but it's also the barrier to getting outside right now.

My friends in New York always tell me about how annoying it is, and how their only chance to get fresh air is sticking their heads out of the windows. Damn, that would suck. They just recently closed down all the facilities in my building: the gym, the movie room, the kids room, and the rooftop patio. It all makes sense, but now there isn't even a more accessible outdoor space. Fresh air will continue to be available only through an open window.

I'm so happy and lucky that I'm not there, although I do miss all of my things already. Oh well. The main thing I'm worried about is all of my plants dying. Maybe, if someone responds to my letter, they can go water my plants for me! But no, that's probably a bad idea.

Wow, I almost forgot about that note I left. I should probably check the mailbox in case anything arrived. I'll do it tomorrow, I'm too tired to do it now.

wednesday, March 18th

March 15th

To: Natalie

From: Astrid

Hi Natalie,

I found your letter on the corner of Bedford and Barrow. I can't say that I'm very bored (things have been pretty hectic over here), but you're right, I've got nothing better to do, and you seem like a cool person just by the fact that you left this letter, so here I am.

My name is Astrid Kane. I'm 18 years old and I'm graduating high school soon. Probably. I guess that depends on whether or not I ever go back to school at all. Do you think school's gonna start again? Do you think this thing is going away soon? I'm trying to be optimistic but honestly I've been proven wrong over and over again about all of this, so I think I'm just going with the flow.

I usually live further downtown, but I'm house sitting near where you left your letter. The people who live here have a dog and two cats, and they're in Toronto right now and since the US closed its borders they can't get back, so I'm stuck here taking care of the animals and plants that aren't mine. But the pets keep me company, which is nice. I wish I could show you photos because they're super cute and I think everyone could use some pets in their lives, but I don't know how to work the printer.

I don't know about you, but I'm starting to go crazy. There's so much going on here, but I really hate being alone for a long period of time, and not being able to talk to people is starting to get to me. I did figure out how to get zoom on the tv, though, so most of the time I've got something going on, at least in the background.

My parents are still at my other house. They call me a lot, because they can't leave the house either, obviously. My dad has a smoking addiction, and his lungs are shot, and he's at risk for lung cancer, so I'm really worried about him. But he doesn't leave the house, and he and my mother are very careful (and getting my mother to be careful about anything is a feat within itself).

But I want to know about you! You're so lucky you got out of the city while you still could. They closed the tunnels a few days ago and they closed the bridges today. A lot of people were trying to get out, and apparently the roads were gridlocked and getting everyone off the bridge took an entire day. Everyone on the Manhattan side was stuck here. Everyone on the other side was free to go. That doesn't feel fair, but... well, I guess that's what quarantine is all about.

How are you in California? How is it over there? It must be nice to not be on an island, you can actually go places.

Are you there with your family? How old are you? Do you have a country house there or something? If you do, that's lucky.

How are the groceries and everything? So far everyone here has been really nice, not taking more food than they need at the moment, helping others when they really need help. I've seen a lot of people give extra food and money to homeless people. I guess the movies made me think everyone would get really hostile really quickly, but that's not really true. Everyone keeps their distance from each other, but... well, they're all nice. As nice as New Yorkers can be.

I feel like I could write so much more but I'll end it here. I hope you and everyone around you is healthy.

My address (right now) is 30 Bedford st. if you want to write me back. Please do, I could use the company.

Stay safe,

Astrid <3

wednesday, March 18, 2020

So I checked my mailbox and I did get a letter! That's crazy! I wasn't really expecting to get one. But this is nice!

It's a girl named Astrid and she's also a senior in high school. wow. That's actually crazy. what are the chances we would be like a year apart. Crazy. She seems really nice, although talks a bit too much about this virus for my liking. obviously it's happening, and much more magnified in New York, but like why does that have to be the subject of every conversation. It gets so boring and lame after a while.

If you think about it, it's kinda strange that her instinct when she decided to write me this letter was to just rant about how bad things are for her in New York. oh and the **worst** thing she said was that I'm lucky. I hate that word when it's used like that. How could you say that? You have no idea what other millions of things that person is going through. Maybe the thing they're "lucky" about is the only good thing in their life. Maybe it's something that they don't think they're lucky to have. Maybe they find you more lucky than themselves and you just made them feel bad about what they have.

I just think that saying "you're lucky" is one of the worst things you could say to someone, no matter who it is. If you must say something along those lines, you could say "I'm jealous." It's much better because it doesn't assume something about the person's life and it puts the feeling on yourself. This is probably the dumbest thing to rant about but who cares. I just hate that phrase. when I told some of my old friends here that I was moving to New York they all said "oh my god, you're so lucky." They had no damn clue that we were moving because my grandma—who had been living with us—just died and we needed to get away.

The more that I've thought about it, I really just think this phrase is a way for people who aren't putting in all the effort to consider something in your life to act like they care.

I knew this guy back in Palm Springs and his older sister was sick with cancer or something really bad. when he was in like 4th grade the family went to Hawaii for like a month. The whole time they were gone kids at school were

saying "oh he's so lucky I wish I could go to Hawaii for a month! He gets to miss so much school". A few weeks after they returned the guy's sister died. Apparently her doctor said that the cancer could not be cured and basically that she was definitely going to die, so the family decided to try and make her last while count, I guess. It makes sense, but it's super sad. Anyways, these dumb kids were saying this garbage and I was so tempted to scream at them "YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN HIS LIFE!" He most definitely was not lucky. The teachers didn't say anything either, because they were told not to. As I grew up and thought back to this moment, I hoped that I wouldn't have to experience something like that, or see someone else experience it. Sure enough, I see it happen all the time. But in the end, even if it makes people feel bad, people are going to say what they want to say sometimes. What can ya do? Okay. Rant over. Back to the letter:

I liked that Astrid took the time to write to me, it was a pleasant surprise. I'll probably write back later today or tomorrow. I can't believe she's alone during all this. That's super intense. I feel so bad about her dad. As of yet, I don't know anyone who's got the virus, or who died from it, but I'm worried for her dad. And I don't even know the guy. But yeah I'm really impressed by the fact that she's alone. Also what a weird coincidence that she's housesitting for some Canadians. Actually maybe not that much of a coincidence since so many Canadians live in our neighborhood.

Thursday, March 19th:

I finally figured out how to work the washing machine! I can finally wash my clothes; I only have enough for a week, since that's how long I thought I'd be staying here. I've only been wearing sweatpants and pajamas lately, and I shower every other day, and I always overpack but I'm really out of clothes now. So thank god I figured it out.

That's my "good thing" today. I'm trying to stay optimistic because it's all so bad.

The hospitals are overfilled now. It's awful. They converted Central Park into a hospital. On the news they showed beds set up in rows with curtains in between. Just... sitting out there in the open. People were in every bed, hooked up to IVs, and they were all as pale as that girl on the stretcher that I saw a week ago. I don't think I'll ever forget her face.

Meow keeps throwing up. Jackie warned me this might happen, but it's every night now. I'll wake up at 2am to hacking that sounds like an old man's, and then I'll have to mop up watery cat vomit half-awake. It's gross. I hope nothing happens to the cat. He's so cute and soft and I don't want him to die on me.

Hugo and I ate lunch together on our balconies today. We found a spot that I guess has good acoustics because we can talk at a normal level and still be heard. I had mac and cheese and he had a chicken sandwich. It was nice, actually talking to someone. Even though we couldn't be near each other, it felt a lot better than facetime, more real. Even though it's kind of the same thing.

~Astrid

Thursday, March 19, 2020

I just wrote my letter to Astrid! I basically just answered all the questions she asked me in her letter, and then I realized I wasn't asking much about her. oops. I get the sense that she'll tell me on her own, though. I'm looking forward to her response!

Also, things with Connor and I are strange. He's super bummed right now because his parents won't let him even go to a park with a ball, so he hasn't played football in a few weeks. Also there's no football to watch because the season got canceled. I keep trying to comfort him but I've discovered that I'm actually so bad at comforting people. I just can not seem to say the right thing. I always end up making it worse by saying something harsh like, "yeah well this definitely sucks but you'll get over it," or something that basically just brushes it aside.

One time I responded like that to Belinda and she freaked out, saying that I always made her feel worse when all she wanted was my support. I didn't really know what she wanted from me because at the time I swore I was saying exactly what she needed to hear. She yelled "If you were in my situation would you really want your best friend to say 'get over it' and 'move on'? I don't think so." I kind of figured out then that I don't really ask people for advice. And I don't tell them about my life's secrets. The advice I give to people is the advice I give myself. And I guess maybe I should give some more considerate advice so they think I care, which I do, it just usually doesn't come across that way. Anyways, at this point I think Connor understands that I'm just not that good at comforting people, but he doesn't seem to appreciate it at the moment.

And also the craziest thing happened this morning that I completely forgot about until now. I was putting my letter in the mailbox, and I found a tiny envelope hiding in the back. There was only my address and a stamp—no name or no return address. Pretty weird. So I took it inside and opened it and I actually thought I was hallucinating because it literally felt like I was in *Pretty Little Liars*. The only thing in the note was "I miss you cutie". Like I'm sorry tell me that isn't super creepy. I'm trying to stay calm about it though, because maybe somebody wanted to send their crush a secret love note. Because to

me it's creepy, but if you knew who it was from it could actually be really cute. who knows. There could be many explanations for it, though. So I'm not going to worry about it right now. Still, it is pretty creepy.

Friday, March 20, 2020

I decided I would start checking the mail everyday so I don't miss any letters from Astrid. Nothing today, though. I told my parents about the letter writing and they thought it was a great idea. My mom started saying she'd be so happy if I finally got some girl friends. why is that such a big deal? It's not that weird I don't think.

I've spent most of today playing my guitar. I went through the list of songs I saved in my tabs app, beginning with "99 Luftballons" and ending with "Zombie". It took me a while, and my fingers look disgusting now. I kept having to peel off layers of hard skin because it would get caught on the strings. It's kinda gross but oh well.

My cousins are learning guitar as well so sometimes I help teach them a chord or a song. They always quit after like 15 minutes though because their fingers hurt too much. It freaks them out that you can see an indent from the strings in the fingertips. Eventually their fingers will get all gross and peely like mine.

I'm getting pretty good at playing "Here comes the sun" now, which is awesome. I personally don't find it too difficult to play, but I wouldn't call it a beginner song. When I hear it played it sounds kind of hard so I'm happy I can play it now. I think I'm gonna go record a video of my playing it right now so I can send it to Connor. He likes to hear me play.

Saturday, March 21st

Friday, March 20th

To: Astrid

From: Natalie

Hello Astrid,

I'm so happy you found my note and took the time to write me a letter. I could've written my email or phone number, but I thought there was something kind of special about talking through letters. I also wasn't sure if anyone would actually write the letter—it is a bit strange to just start a conversation with a stranger. But thanks, it's good to hear from you!

I'm 17 and also—hopefully—graduating soon. It's so sad, I can't believe we may not get to experience those milestone moments. But it is what it is, I guess. Nothing we can do about it. I doubt we'll be going back to school, though. And as for this virus, I obviously can't say anything for certain, but I don't think it's going to be good.

It's funny that the people you're housesitting/plantsitting/petsitting for are in Canada because my family is actually Canadian. I have a dual citizenship—Canadian and American, but I've only ever lived in the United States. And to answer your question about my house here, it's not a country house. I actually moved to New York from here about three years ago. I'm here with my parents and my cousins, aunt & uncle, and their three dogs. Luckily our house is pretty big and we've got lots of safely accessible outdoor space so it doesn't actually feel like there are seven people (plus three dogs) in one house.

You're not alone, also—I'm going crazy, too. I haven't been doing anything of interest. Thank God I still have an acoustic guitar here. Some days I spend hours playing it. I've been spending a lot of time outside, though. We also have a pool in the backyard so sometimes I go in and play games with my cousins. They kind of have this mindset where they constantly need an activity, which really gets annoying after a while because whenever the parents are working I'm

the one who has to entertain the kids. But it's ok, my aunt usually makes sure I don't have to, and it's not like I have anything better to do.

I'm sorry about your dad, that must be scary. Are you unhappy that you're away from him right now? It seems like New York is way ahead of California right now, but we're doing all the same preventative actions. Palm Springs, specifically, is a strange place to be right now since there is so much space for people to be spread out, and the hospital systems are so great, but that's only because such a large part of the population are senior citizens. I know we're lucky to be here, but I think it would have been silly for us to stay in New York if we had this place here. We actually just came here for spring break on the first official day of quarantine. My mom was already here, so it was just my dad and I. The airport and flight were empty, which is a good thing, but we were also really careful.

I'm just realizing I completely forgot to tell you who I am. My name is Natalie Smith. As I said, I'm 17 and a senior in highschool. I just heard that I got into Western University, which was my top choice for college. It's in London, Ontario. Where are you hoping to go for college? My boyfriend and I were planning on going to Western together, but he didn't get in. :(His name is Connor and he's the most amazing guy I've ever met, not to overshare. He plays hockey, too, which I love but it also makes me a bit nervous since I watch NHL hockey all the time so I know the bad things that can happen.

Do you have a boyfriend? Or girlfriend? Tell me about your friends.

Also, I'm not surprised to hear that everyone in New York is being perfect and friendly. Lots of people think that New Yorkers are just fending for themselves right now, but I knew they wouldn't. So I'm glad there's at least that in New York. Also, I've seen videos online of people singing everyday at 7pm to thank the healthcare workers for their efforts—so sweet. Please stay safe and make sure your parents are as well. I look forward to your next letter!

Natalie

Friday, March 20th:

I got a letter back from Natalie! It seems like she really is a real human being. She's seventeen and she gives me the vibe of being less willing to give out information on herself. Or maybe she's just shier. She seemed to want to take things back a lot. She told me about her boyfriend Connor who's apparently the "nicest boy ever" but didn't really expand on that. I wish she would. I want to know about the nicest boy ever. (That seems too good to be true).

Her family is Canadian and she's living in Palm Springs with her parents and her cousins, and she plays guitar and likes hockey. She seems like a cool person. Maybe I can bond with her over hockey; it's the only sport I can stand watching on TV outside of the olympics.

What should I write back? What do you write to someone who knows nothing about you? It feels almost silly to keep introducing myself, but I think that's all I can do.

You know what I've noticed? These days really make you realize who your real friends are. And it all boils down to who you want to take time out of your day to zoom. Because I feel like I've always been the person to do anything with anyone; just because I like to talk to people and I can't be alone. But there are all sorts of people that I *just can't* bring myself to keep in touch with. Or they can't. And it's fascinating, realizing all those relationships were only surface relationships. Maybe I'll write about that. Natalie's in California. Maybe she'll understand.

~Astrid

Friday, March 20, 2020

I decided I would start checking the mail everyday so I don't miss any letters from Astrid. Nothing today, though. I told my parents about the letter writing and they thought it was a great idea. My mom started saying she'd be so happy if I finally got some girl friends. why is that such a big deal? It's not that weird I don't think.

I've spent most of today playing my guitar. I went through the list of songs I saved in my tabs app, beginning with "99 Luftballons" and ending with "Zombie". It took me a while, and my fingers look disgusting now. I kept having to peel off layers of hard skin because it would get caught on the strings. It's kinda gross but oh well.

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I'm getting pretty good at playing "Here comes the sun" now, which is awesome. I personally don't find it too difficult to play, but I wouldn't call it a beginner song. When I hear it played it sounds kind of hard so I'm happy I can play it now. I think I'm gonna go record a video of my playing it right now so I can send it to Connor. He likes to hear me play.

Saturday, March 21st

March 20th

To: Natalie

From: Astrid

Hi Natalie,

I'm so glad you wrote back! I know you were worried that no one would respond but it was kind of second nature for me, if that makes sense? I saw your letter and I just *had* to. Anyone who posts a letter like that is cool to me.

I agree that letters are a much more special way of communicating. I feel like emailing/texting is so modern and normal, and things aren't really modern or normal these days.

I hear Canada is doing much better than the US right now! Maybe it's something with the cold. Don't viruses die in the colder weather? Or is that the heat? Anyway, I heard that citizens of countries can travel, so maybe if this gets worse you can go up to Canada and get away from the states. Everything I've heard from books and movies says that the US always goes to shit really fast. Maybe Canada is different.

You're so lucky you can go outside! It must be much more rural over there; there's too many people everywhere over here and I can't go outside even to walk the dog. I have to let her poop in the backyard. They're saying it's too dangerous because of how bad it's getting. Just over a week since they locked down the city and a fourth of the population has it! Can you believe that? I don't know how it is over there but *everyone* is getting it over here. They converted the parks into extra hospitals because the hospitals are overfilled. They're putting bodies in trucks because the morgues are filled. There are ambulances driving down my street every hour, it's like I don't even notice the sirens or the lights anymore. And it's only been ten days!

Everyone is trying to stay happy and safe though. I try to zoom my friends as often as I can because I can't stand being in this empty house alone anymore. It's so fancy and sparse-- I imagine if you have a big family, or a taste for fancy things, then it's not so bad. But it's just me and three pets, and I feel too small.

About my dad-- I'm really worried about him, but I'm not too unhappy being away from him. I'd rather be with my parents, but I think I'd just pose more of a risk to him if I

were there. I think the best thing for me right now *is* to be alone, at least until this thing dies down a little. If it ever does. I just wish he'd stop smoking, you know?

Anyway, I don't want to bring you down with all this sad stuff. Talking about the virus is getting old already.

I'm hoping to get into UPenn. The decisions come out soon, and I'm super nervous. I never thought I was smart enough to go to an ivy, but the college counselors said I should apply to one just in case. They shouldn't have gotten my hopes up, because I'm sure I won't get in and now I'll be sad about it.

I used to have a lot of close friends at school, but I think this pandemic is making us all realize who are real "close" friends are. If that makes sense. I'm only keeping in touch with a few people, but that's okay. It makes me realize who I'm actually good friends with, and who I was just friends with because I was in their class.

I also met someone recently! He lives two houses down and we met while walking our dogs. He has the cutest little shar pei puppy named Ashe. We figured out that we can talk over our balconies, so I do get some real human interaction once in a while. I think the person in the house between us is gone, because they haven't turned on their lights since I got here.

I'm not dating anyone, but I think that's the best for right now. I don't know how you and your boyfriend are managing it during all of this. I think I'd go crazy trying to be a good girlfriend. I wouldn't know what to do.

But please tell me more about Connor! He seems like such a cool guy, and if you really think he's the "most amazing guy" ever, then I definitely want to hear more. Where/when did you meet? How long have you been dating? You wanted to go to college together, so it must be sort of serious, right?

I want to know about your friends too! How is staying with your cousins? Are they older or younger? Do you have to take care of them? What about other people in the area? Do you ever see anyone else? I know Palm Springs is full of old people, so are there a lot of sick people too?

I hope you and your family stays safe. Don't go outside unless you have to. Don't go outside even for walks. There are lots of people on the news who just wanted to go outside for some exercise or some fresh air and ended up dead. Please don't end up dead.

~Astrid <3

Saturday, March 21, 2020

I went out and checked the mailbox as per-new-usual this morning and I found a letter from Astrid! It's a pretty nice letter again. She asks so many questions, though. Not that it's a bad thing, just an observation, I mean I guess it's natural. We don't know each other so she's trying to learn more about me. I hope I don't come across as rude because I'm definitely not asking her enough questions. I'm not that selfish, I don't think. I just feel like the important things will come up naturally, and the unimportant stuff I'll just learn somewhere along the way.

Also for some weird reason I feel like I'd forget it faster if I directly asked about it. It actually makes no sense. But I guess if I learn about something naturally, it's embedded in a specific moment that triggered it, so maybe that's why I'm more likely to remember it. Who knows.

So I responded to her letter and it ended up being pretty long. Oh well. Hopefully she responds soon. I'm getting bored.

Sunday, March 22nd:

I've started listening to more music. I can't stand the house being so silent all the time. There's no one in either of the houses next to mine, so I'm not afraid to blast music. Hugo said he could faintly hear the music during our balcony lunch yesterday, and he said he thought he was going crazy for a bit before he realized where the music was coming from.

The morgues are overfilled in all the hospitals. They've started cooling down trucks and putting dead bodies in there. On the news there were reporters standing outside one of them, and it was terrifying.

New York's over 500 people now. I think like 75% of the people in NYC are at least infected. I don't really know. I'm trying to stay updated but I think if I watch any more of the news I'll go crazy.

I wonder how Natalie is doing. I wonder if she's gotten my letter yet. I wonder if it was really a girl named Natalie, and not a 75-year-old creepy man who wants letters. I don't think I'd blame him, though. We all need someone to talk to. Even if it was an old man, I think I'd respond anyway. I don't know.

I know NYC is like 200% ahead of the rest of the country. The ambulances going down my street have multiplied. Still, no one has gotten violent yet. I expected more movie-like catastrophe to go down, especially in New York City, but I guess people are nicer than we all give them credit for.

~Astrid

Sunday, March 22, 2020

I AM GONNA CRY. OMGGGGGGGG

I was changing the tuning of my guitar to open E and the G string popped!!! I could cry. This feels like the literal worst thing that could happen to me right now. I've been playing that for so many hours each day to escape my boredom. Ughhhhhh. I have no idea how to replace a string and I also don't have any replacement strings or the weird blue tool you need to do it. I'm screwed. How have I never had to replace a string?? I've been playing guitar for a few years and I guess I've never broken one.

I told my mom about it (not very nicely) and demanded that we order a new guitar right away, and she told me to calm down and that we would see about taking it to Guitar Center to get it restrung. Of course Guitar Center is CLOSED. Ahhhhhhhh stupid covid!

And it was the worst timing in terms of what I was playing, too. I had finally got the courage to change the tuning on my guitar so I could play "She Talks to Angels" by the Black Crowes. Such an amazing song. And it's actually pretty easy. After like two hours I had it down, just not up to the song's speed. It would have been perfect in like a week if the stupid string did break on me. I don't know if I'll ever tune my guitar differently again. Bad decision. I'm such an idiot. Oh well. I'll figure it out, I guess.

I guess I could borrow my cousin's guitar in the meantime. Although it's so small it's basically a ukulele. This absolutely sucks. Anyways this kind of ruined my morning but I'm planning on sitting in the sun later this afternoon because it's supposed to be 106 degrees and completely cloudless. I gotta keep the tan going. If there's one thing I get from this virus it's gonna be a good tan.

okay and I literally think this day is cursed or something. or actually maybe I'm cursed. So on my way inside from tanning I checked the mailbox for a letter like always, and I found another tiny envelope. It looked exactly the same as the last one. when I opened it, it said "Don't take this the wrong way but if you do anything risky, I will come for you. I know where you are right now, obviously." WTF!!!! That's word-for-word. I'm obviously gonna write these down in

case I decide to use them in a novel I write in the future. That's mainly what this whole journal is for, anyways. But I can't with this. Now I'm pretty sure something is definitely going on. So now it's like, do I tell somebody about this? I feel like nobody will care. Actually, Connor would definitely care, I think I'll tell him. I'm not gonna tell my parents because they'll either completely freak out or barely care at all. I think barely caring is the more likely outcome, so there's probably no point.

Connor and I texted about it. He seemed very concerned but he assured me that it could still be just an accident. He told me to wait on a third letter before doing anything or telling anyone. He told me I should keep it a total secret, too, in case the person I talk to is sending the notes and it makes them angry. I was really worried he would go off on me and say he knew I shouldn't have put that note on the pole! I was waiting for an "I told you so". But I didn't get one so that's good.

March 23rd

March 21st

To: Astrid

From: Natalie

Hi Astrid,

I still appreciate you responding to my note. Texting is great and all but it's lost its charm for sure, you know? As for your point about Canada, to my knowledge they are doing pretty well with everything, although it's obviously still devastating there. I think the key is that Canada started doing all of the hard-hitting stuff right when New York did, the difference was that Canada was way behind. They'd only had a couple hundred cases at that point. This is all stuff that I hear from my uncle in Winnipeg.

What you've told me about New York is crazy. I can't believe how bad it is. Somehow it's still not like that here, but I have a feeling it's coming. I'll keep you posted. And actually to your point about being able to travel to Canada, I've heard my parents talk about going there this summer or something. California is currently not allowing people to leave, but once that lifts, we're probably going to split and go to Winnipeg. My aunt and uncle have this mansion thing there and they've got like 70 acres of land. It's insane. But I'm guessing most of my family will be there so it will be full.

It'll be good for me to be there because when school starts in the fall, I'll be close. So many schools are talking about doing online classes for the first semester at least, which would suck, but probably be the right decision. But if I'm there, I'll at least be in the same time zone and be close enough that if even a small portion of the student body is allowed on campus, I'd have that option, you know?

UPenn is a great school and that's super awesome that you're aiming for it. I sort of forgot it was an ivy, but good luck! Let me know when you hear. I looked up photos of the campus and it's so pretty, damn. What is your backup choice? Also, what do you want to study?

I really like what you said about discovering who your true friends are. There are so many people who I just talked to because I'd sit next to them in

bio three times a week. There are also people who I send a blank screen snapchat to once a day, but avoid conversation beyond that. They're kind of dull, those relationships. Sometimes I wonder if they're even worth having. But oh well, who's going around saying "nope, sorry, I refuse to talk to you unless we're best friends"? Nobody.

As for the guy you met, the whole talking over the balcony scene is pretty cute. It's like something from a movie. If you chose to pursue that relationship, you could go for a "Love is Blind" type of thing where you communicate and tell each other your deepest secrets without seeing each other or being with each other physically. It works with the whole quarantine situation. I guess if you haven't seen that show this comment might not make any sense. I'll explain further if you need, but I highly recommend the show. Keep me posted.

You asked about Connor. I really can't imagine that you'd want to know all that much about him, considering you'll probably never meet him. I guess I can give you some brief descriptions, though, since you asked. He's got the build of a football player (at least the highschool version), he's the sweetest guy you'll ever meet. These descriptions may not sound all that unique or interesting, but trust me, if you knew him you'd agree. The only problem is things are a bit weird between us right now, because of the whole college thing, and being in quarantine certainly isn't helping. Or maybe it is? I'm not too sure. We're kind of stuck right now, both of us are scared to say what we really think. Oh well, I'll figure it out.

My friends are all dumb guys—I love them, of course—but we're having some trouble keeping in touch. Most of them sleep all day long. No joke. They wake up at 4pm everyday and wonder why I'm annoyed. Then they say they're too busy to facetime because they're in a death match of some stupid video game. I guess I kind of just ranted to you about my problems, I'm sorry about that. Anyways, my friends are kind of dull sometimes so I've learned not to rely on them. My cousins are crazy, but they're fun. They're 10 and 8. It's refreshing to get a handful of innocent energy right now, you know? I've started helping out my aunt and uncle with them since they're so busy with work during the week.

we don't really talk to any other people in the area. Palm Springs is retirement central so we try extra hard to keep our distance. Even though there are so many old people around, things aren't actually that bad here for them. The hospitals look empty from the outside still. I think because the hospital system is so equipped to taking care of a bunch of old people, they're not scrambling around yet. Hopefully it doesn't get to that point.

I look forward to your next letter. Stay safe,

-Natalie

Monday, March 23rd

I got the letter back from Natalie today. She says California is way behind New York, which makes sense, because where she is is in the middle of nowhere compared to Manhattan. She's living with like ten people though, and that makes me uncomfy just thinking about all those people in the same place. Maybe it's just because I've been stuck in this huge empty house for so long.

I don't really have much to say, I guess. She told me to watch Love is Blind on Netflix and I will because I have nothing else to do and at least then I can talk to her about it. I feel like i'm not really saying anything interesting to her.

I'll write back soon. Not today. I don't feel like writing. I have a headache and everything hurts and I don't want to write.

~Astrid

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

So it's 9:45 pm and this is the first time I've sat down to write in two days because I've been so busy. It sounds like bs because I'm in quarantine, how could I possibly be so busy? But I'm fr, I've genuinely been busy. I've been doing lots of stuff to help out my aunt and uncle with the kids. I helped them with some school stuff and some activities. And now I have to go take the dogs for their nightly walk.

Wednesday, March 25th:

Something really weird happened today. I was filling the bird feeder out front and I saw a guy looking at the house next door. The one between my house and Hugh's. I always thought the people in there were either dead or gone, but this guy was looking at it like he was looking for someone, so I asked him if everything was okay. He said his girlfriend lived here but had moved to California to ride the pandemic out and he was just checking in.

It was Connor! Natalie's boyfriend! I asked him if his girlfriend was named Natalie and he said yes, and I said I had found her letter and was writing letters back and forth with her. He seemed to really care about her, and I found that pretty sweet. He's really tall, and has this very intense stare. That was all I could focus on with his mask on. I can see why Natalie likes him, I guess.

It was so weird. I felt so put off from talking to someone new. I guess I haven't talked to anyone in so long that I've lost all ability to introduce myself in person.

I saw a lady collapse outside my house today. She was all pale and grey like that other girl, and she was walking her dog and swaying around when she just... fell. I called 911 and got an ambulance. I've never had to call 911 before. They told me to "absolutely not go outside to help her" even if I wanted, to. I was really conflicted about that anyway. I don't want to get sick, but I don't want her to die.

So I opened the window and told her doctors were coming. She was begging me to come out and help her, and it was awful hearing her like that, but the operator on the phone was yelling at me to stay inside because the ambulance was almost there and it was awful.

The ambulance got there quickly enough and took her away. They took the dog, too. I wonder what's going to happen to it. I wonder what's going to happen to her.

~Astrid

wednesday, March 25, 2020

Connor and I are facetimeing in 20 minutes. I think he's a little freaked because I was pretty persistent about it. He was telling me that today was kind of not ideal for him to talk, but I told him I really needed to talk to him so he agreed. But I realized that probably comes across like I'm gonna break up with him. I have thought about it, and I'm still considering it, but I'm not gonna do that now. It's too soon.

I just wanted to talk to him because I'm kinda lonely and he's the only person who knows about the weird notes I found in the mailbox. It's extra lonely that I can't talk to anyone else about it but him. Oh well, I haven't gotten anything for like three or four days so maybe the person realized they got the wrong address or something.

Friday, March 25th:

I got into UPenn today! They sent me a nice email with a bunch of congratulations and had me confirm everything on their website. I had to cancel everything else because that's where I'm going, if college even happens at all at this point. I can't imagine rooming with someone, gathering in classrooms, all that. Everything's been so empty lately that even just the thought of crowds makes me uncomfortable.

Maybe they'll make the first semester online. But what's the point then? What's the point of paying for an Ivy, or any college really, if you're not even going to be there?

I want to go back to school. That's the last thing I thought I'd ever say, but it's true. I want to go back to school because I'm so bored and tired and scared. There's something different about this fear, because it's not immediate. I guess it's the knowledge that if I slip up and get this thing, I'll probably die. And that's it. Nothing I can really do about it.

The death rate has reached $\frac{1}{3}$. One of every three people who gets it dies. That means you have a 25/75 chance of dying if you get it. I guess me being moderately healthy helps, but who knows how much the second hand smoke has affected me throughout the years. Who knows how bad my immune system *really* is. I get sick all the time, but that's because I'm not particularly careful about not getting sick.

It's been just over two weeks since it was reported to enter the US (I think it's been way more than that) and 1 *million* people have already died. It feels like so much longer than two weeks.

Anyway, I'm writing this all in here because I'm trying to stay positive for my friends. They're all scared too and they come to me for support for their mundane problems and I don't want to scare them further. I'd like to make them happy.

Something really weird happened today. I had to go out to get cat food because I guess I'm an idiot and forgot last time. I wrapped up every inch of my body and it was *so* hot in all my clothes but I'm not risking it. I'm surprised the cashiers are still working, but they have all the protection too, including glass walls barring them from the customers, and they're apparently getting paid more than before just to keep them coming in since everyone threatens to quit.

Anyway, I bought my cat food and a lot more regular canned food. I still have a lot left because I've been rationing but it's good to buy more just in case.

On the way back there was a letter posted to the same pole that Natalie left her letter on. It had the same design as the one she left, which really weirded me out because that one is sitting on my coffee table back at the house. And she's in California, so she couldn't have put it there, right?

I took it, and all it said inside was *GET AWAY FROM HER* in thick black sharpie letters. *What?*

It has to mean get away from Natalie, but this is some horror movie shit and I can't bother with it. I'll ask Natalie if this is some stupid prank or something. I don't have time to worry about a weirdo obsessing over my relationship with a penpal when there are people dying all around me.

~Astrid

Thursday, March 26, 2020

uh oh. I found another note today. I'm too scared to open it. I asked Connor if he would call me while I opened it, but he said he was busy. He told me he's sure everything is fine, and that I should just open it. Now I'm actually considering just not opening it at all. Maybe I should just burn it or throw it out.

So I opened it and I'm now officially terrified. It said "Just so you know I think you're drop **dead** gorgeous. But I think you should wear your hair down more often, it really highlights your face, don'tcha think?." WTF!! This is not normal. I'm trying to stay reasonably calm because I'm not sure what losing it would accomplish.

I'm gonna text Connor and ask him what I should do. Hopefully he responds.

He responded right away, thank god. I explained the note and he just told me not to worry and to distract myself so I stop thinking about it. I mean it makes sense I guess. Except at this point I kinda feel like I should tell someone. Like an adult or police officer or something. And yeah wait Connor literally told me if I get a third one I should tell someone about it, and now he's still telling me to basically do nothing? At the same time I guess police are busy right now dealing with the virus, which by the way has gotten way worse here. But so now I'm not sure what to do. Connor definitely has my best interests at heart, so I guess I'll just do what he says.

on second thought, maybe I should tell Astrid. I have a theory. So I left the note with my address on it and she picked it up and wrote me a letter. I know for a fact she has the note, she sent me a picture. But what if somebody else saw the note, and wrote down the address before she found it. Maybe somebody else has my contact info and is writing me these notes. The one problem with that is it seems like the person knows what I look like. So maybe it's someone I know who saw it and thought it would be super funny to prank me. It's definitely something Jackson would do. Oh wait but it can't be Jackson because he's been at his house in Connecticut for the last few weeks.

who the hell is it. I guess there's also the possibility that someone who just already had the address is doing it. Or, probably my least favourite possibility, but also probably the most likely: Astrid is not who she says she is. What if she's sending me the notes and the letters. It makes her seem very unsuspecting. Maybe I'll do a handwriting analysis. Or I could pay attention to the language she uses and compare it to the note. The 2 week unit of linguistics in my forensics class might actually be put to use!

March 26th:

I spend all the time in the world with Gracie. She's the best in the world to hug, and she likes hugs, and I can tell she's getting antsy from the lack of walks because she spends a lot of time running up and down the stairs. She's a big fluffy ball of fur and she just wants hugs.

The mail is closing tomorrow. That means they won't pick anything up after tomorrow. They had this huge "Breaking News" thing on the TV and said that anything put into a mailbox today or tomorrow would be delivered, but after that nothing would be picked up. I wrote Natalie a final letter and put my email at the bottom. Hopefully she emails me. That would make communicating much easier.

Mom called me just now. Dad's got it. Dad's got it. Dad's got it.

She doesn't know how he got it. Apparently he didn't go outside, but she woke up one day and there he was next to her, turning blue-grey and wheezing when he breathed. She put on a mask and her gloves and did the same to him and tried to get him up but he couldn't stand. She called an ambulance and they took him away.

The hospitals are full and he's in a bed in Central Park. They don't have enough ventilators for everyone but they managed to get one for him.

I knew his smoking would fuck him over. I tried to tell him, but he said whatever damage smoking would do had "already been done." And I guess he was right.

I don't know what to do. I've never had family die. Not close family. Not my dad.

I think he's going to die. I think he's going to die and I can't even see him. I haven't seen him in almost a month and I can't even go and give him one last hug.

My dad's got it, and he's going to die, and I'm still stuck in this huge empty house with three pets that aren't mine pretending like everything is ok.

~Astrid

Friday, March 27, 2020

To distract myself I've been watching way too much Netflix. This new show came out and I'm addicted to it. It's called Outer Banks. The problem is there are only 10 episodes out and I don't know what I'm gonna do once I'm done watching it. So I watched up to episode 6 by myself, and then when I told my mom about it she said she wanted to watch it with me. So now I'm rewatching it with her. It's so good. It's sort of like Riverdale but way less bad, with much hotter guys, and the soundtrack is super good. I don't really know many of the songs, but it's like surf music so it's super chill to listen to. It's also pretty creepy, though, so I usually have to watch an episode of Modern Family afterwards so I'm not scared to go to sleep.

I miss Connor a lot. We haven't seen each other for a while and things are not easy over Facetime, phone calls, texting, and Snapchat. In a way, we're actually getting a trial for a long distance relationship now during this lockdown. I have to say, it's definitely not ideal. Is it worth it, though? That's the million dollar question. I just wish I could figure out the answer.

Connor definitely suspects that I'm gonna end things, and I don't think he knows what to do about it. He's not stupid, he knows we'd be long distance and I'm sure he's not too happy about that. But I just think he's a bit more willing to risk it for something like that. It's not that I don't love him enough for it, I just genuinely think I'm probably not strong enough for that. And realistically, if either of us were to get hurt by this in the future, it would be him, and it would be my fault.

I'd say at this point I'm definitely leaning towards ending it. There's also the whole thing about how I've never dated anyone else and maybe I should go to college single so I can be, you know, open for new relationships. I would never make this the main reason because I think it's kind of a stupid cop-out, but it does add to the argument that I should end it, I think. AHHHHHHH I don't know what to do.

I wonder if it would be weird to bring it up with Astrid. She seems smart, and I don't know if she has dating experience, but she definitely knows people

who do, so I may as well ask to get a second opinion. Except if she is the person sending me creepy notes, maybe it's a bad idea to give her personal insight into my life. Oh well. What's she gonna do, come here and kill me? I don't think so. In the next letter I'll try to bring it up.

Sunday, March 29th

March 26th

From: Astrid

To: Natalie

Natalie,

I'm glad you're doing well. It's so cool that you're in a place that's safe(r). Please enjoy it all for me! I think you were right when you said it was coming; this thing spreads fast, and a lot of people got out of Manhattan before they closed the island, and I think it's going to be a long time before any of this goes away. God I wish it would.

I got into UPenn a few days ago! I heard back on the 27th, and I don't know what I'm going to study yet, but UPenn has options. I think they're also doing at least the first semester online, but it's so far away who knows at this point, right? They might not even have school at all for all that I know. I just wish I could go back to school. I never thought I'd say that, but I just want to get this all over with. I want this all to go away. I'm sorry for dumping this all on you, I just have no one else to tell these things too. I don't want to depress my friends because they know me, and they come to me for support and to get away from this virus stuff, so I don't want to bring them down. But I have to tell someone.

Natalie, my dad got it yesterday. He's in the hospital now with my mom. I think "hospital" is a loose term. He's in a bed in Central Park, and there aren't enough ventilators for everyone but he managed to get one. I knew his smoking would fuck him over. I tried to tell him, but he said whatever damage smoking would do had "already been done." And I guess he was right.

I think my dad's going to die. And I can't even see him. I haven't seen him in almost a month and I can't even go and give him one last hug.

You're the first person I'm telling. I don't want my friends to pity me, because I don't need pity. They're going to want to come over and comfort me and distract me but I can't have them do that because then they'll risk themselves and I can't have them die too.

I'm sorry for dumping this all on you. I don't want to make you depressed too. I just had to tell someone. I guess I'm kind of forcing you to listen to me, but thanks for listening anyway.

I watched Love Is Blind! I had nothing else to do so I figured I would. I've only seen the first episode but it seems really interesting so far. It would be interesting to see if that really works, if you could really fall in love with someone without ever seeing them. I feel like seeing someone always has *something* to do with it, right? Even if we don't want it to? I don't know, I could be very wrong.

As for Hugh, that doesn't quite work because I can see him, but I guess it's similar because we can't go near each other. It's like a zoom call, except there's no screen.

Oh, and I think I saw Connor the other day! He was outside your house-- I didn't know you lived next door to here!-- and he said he was checking in. That made sense. I was putting seed in the bird feeder and there was this tall guy looking over your fence, so I asked him what was up and he said his girlfriend lived here but was in California right now and he was making sure the house was all locked up. Your house is right between Hugh's and mine!

Anyway, Connor seemed really nice. He has this intense stare that's sort of endearing. I get why you like him, I think. From the short conversation I had with him he seems to really care about you.

I get the whole college-problems thing. It would be cool if things could work out, but maybe they won't. I guess that's just how life is. I like to be straightforward, so if I were you I'd tell him everything you're feeling, but you're probably not like me. You probably shouldn't take relationship advice from me, either. The "relationships" I've been in haven't really been "relationships."

I get the thing with your friends, too. All of my friends are sleeping past noon and it's crazy to me. I think it would be nice to sleep that long, though. Get my mind off everything for longer. I wish I had cousins or something to keep me company and keep me busy.

The mail is closing in a few days. My email is astridjkane@gmail.com. Please email me! Reading your letters takes me out of NYC for a bit, and it's nice.

Please stay safe and healthy. I hope everyone over there is okay.

~Astrid <3

Sunday, March 29, 2020

I got another letter from Astrid today. She got into UPenn which is awesome. I've seen photos of the campus and it looks so pretty. Imagine it in the winter. I hate the cold weather, but there's something about the old buildings coated in sparkly snow that just seems so nice. I'm not used to seeing that in New York because the snow usually turns mushy and brown pretty quickly. Oh god. She said her dad has the virus. That's bad. I wonder how he got it. She said she was sick for like a month before. I bet she had it and passed it on to him. That must be awful, knowing that his chances of survival are slim. And he's literally in the middle of a park. Jeez, this thing is messed up. I'm gonna have to write something really nice in the next message to her. I feel the right things, but I'm terrible at communicating them, so hopefully it makes her feel a bit better, or at least a bit less bad.

She also told me the mail was closing. I never heard about that, but I'm sure she's right. It makes sense. Most things are getting shut down now. So anyways she attached her email address so we can stay in contact once the mail cuts out. I don't think I'm gonna respond to her yet, though. Partly because I'm just not in the mood, another part because as soon as I start the email convo it's never gonna end, and also because I want to tell her about the creepy notes but I need to figure out how. If it is her sending them, I feel like there's a way I can set a trap or something. Or maybe not. Now that I'm thinking about it I don't think that would work. Maybe if I just try to make her feel super bad and guilty she'll fess up. Or maybe she'll do nothing and I'll have to figure out if she's telling the truth or not.

I've considered asking Connor how he thinks I should tell her, but I know for a fact he's just gonna get super mad and annoying about how it's my own fault I'm getting these notes because I was dumb enough to post my number on a street lamp. Well, sorry, me, for putting me in this situation. I'll figure it out myself then.

Monday, March 30, 2020

So I was just looking at the notes again and I had a crazy thought. What if the person sending them to me is Belinda. Like this whole time I've been assuming that the person is in New York because that's where I left the note, but Belinda knows my address here. She used to come over like everyday after school. It's definitely a bit of a stretch, though. I literally haven't talked to her in like three years. I think I follow her on Instagram, but that's the extent of our current relationship. I guess it's still a possibility, though. Normal people wouldn't still be that mad at their friend after she moved away (which would have happened whether she wanted to or not, for the record) three years ago. But, after all, she is most definitely not normal so I guess she could still be really mad and could have decided that sending me creepy messages is the perfect way to get back to me. Really??? Nahhh. There's no way. But I guess it's possible.

I haven't gotten any new letters today, though, so that's good. I don't wanna jinx it so I'm gonna knock on something. I'm gonna have to go to the other side of my room because the only wooden thing I have is my bedside table. Ok, I just knocked, I should be good now. As Michael Scott would say, "I'm not superstitious, but I am a little stitious." Iconic.

Monday, March 30th

Deliveries stopped today. Everything is closed. I took a walk because I couldn't stand being inside anymore, and Gracie was freaking out about not being able to go outside either. It's a ghost town outside. There's no one anywhere and no cars except for a few ambulances every hour or so. It's a bit freaky.

Dad is getting worse. Mom's not allowed to stay with him because then she'd get sick, but the doctors let her call him and apparently he can barely talk anymore because of all the coughing. He's coughing up blood now.

I don't want him to die. I want him to hug me like he did when I was little and tell me everything was going to be okay.

But he can't. I might never see him again. I think I just have to come to terms with that.

~Astrid

Tuesday, March 31, 2020

So everything was going great yesterday and actually all of today, too, until like ten minutes ago. My uncle told me something arrived for me. He said he thought it might be like a love note from Connor because there were some heart stickers on the front. Well, it was definitely not from Connor. It was another creepy message. This time it said: "I'd like you to think about your life choices right now. Make the wrong one and I'll see to it that you regret it." I hope wtf! what choices are they talking about?? College? I feel like I don't have any choices right now more than ever.

It's a good thing my uncle didn't open it, though. If he knew what was inside I'm pretty sure things woulda turned out really bad somehow. It doesn't really make sense because I guess they could help out. But for now I think I should keep it private. I'll tell them if it really gets bad. Because honestly it technically could be like just a huge prank. whoever's doing it is kind of a jerk but at least that would be better than having an actual stalker.

Things are looking up though because my guitar strings are supposed to arrive tomorrow! Thank god. It will be soooo nice to be able to just spend hours shredding the skin off the tips of my fingers. That doesn't sound nearly as fun as it actually is. One thing I'm super torn about is if I should not tune my guitar differently. Because that's partly why the string broke in the first place, but also because there's so much dust here that probably gathered in the string while I wasn't using it. So maybe I should avoid breaking another one and just play things in standard tuning. Also I need to figure out if I need to replace all the strings or just the one that broke. Big questions. Big day tomorrow.

Tuesday, March 31st

Dad's not doing so well. I got to facetime him today, because he's basically on his deathbed. He looked so much worse than I expected. I tried to expect the worst, because I knew that if I expected him to be fine and normal then I would be disappointed and probably not be able to handle it.

I wasn't expecting to be scared. I could barely recognize him. He was so pale and sickly, and his eyes were bloodshot. They looked so creepy, because they were so blue and red at the same time.

But he's still my dad.

He was never afraid of death. He was the one I looked up to as a little girl, because he was so unafraid of everything. So accepting that things were going to happen, and that that was okay. Smoking was his only vice, and that was the thing that ended up killing him faster.

He didn't look afraid, even though he was ten times thinner than he was when I last saw him, just skin and bones and hollowed cheeks. But he didn't look afraid. And I really admire him for that.

When I was little, I went through that usual little kid existential phase, freaking out about life and death and everything in between. My dad was the deeper thinker of my two parents, and maybe even the more comforting. I think I must have been seven or eight, and I was small for my age so I looked probably six, and I stumbled into the living room at 2am to see my dad in his rocking chair, reading a book and smoking a cigarette.

He did his best not to smoke around me, and when I was little I always hated it. I always told him to stop, and mom always fought with him over it, but they bickered over everything.

But I remember that moment the best, because he never told me anything to sugarcoat it. Never said anything about something pleasing happening after death. Never said it wouldn't happen, or that something beautiful came after. Instead he put out his cigarette, sat me on his lap, and told me that yeah, we don't really know anything. We don't know what comes after death, we don't know anything about anything, but that's okay, because nobody does. And all we can do is wait and see.

It doesn't sound very comforting when I say it now, but it really helped little me. I remember sitting there for a long time, and he sat with me because he was always willing

to sit and do nothing with me for however long I needed. I remember him smelling like smoke, and I remember feeling like if he *didn't* smell like smoke, then he wouldn't smell like my Dad, and then he wouldn't *be* my dad. Which is stupid, but I guess that's when I accepted his smoking as part of him. I guess that's when I accepted that if he was willing to accept the consequences of all that, then there was nothing I could do about it.

So I guess that's the same feeling I got when I was facetimeing him. Because I was, and am, scared, because he's my dad, and I don't want my dad to die. But there's no point in being scared of death, because it happens to everyone, and its inevitable. That's what he says at least. And he didn't look scared.

I just want my dad back. But that's not going to happen. And I didn't think I should spend my last moments with him making him comfort me, so I just laughed with him, because that's what he wants, and that's what I would want if I were dying. And I'll keep trying to tell myself that he's not scared, so I shouldn't be.

I just hope it'll work.

~Astrid

wednesday, April 1, 2020

OMG. I AM GOING TO PUNCH SOMETHING. SOMEBODY BRING ME SOMETHING TO SMASH ON THE CONCRETE. The strings. Are still. Not. here. whyyyyyyyyyyyy. My calluses are fading away too!!! I'm actually gonna suck at guitar by the time the strings eventually arrive. Or I'll just forget all the songs. oh well, there's nothing I can do but wait.

okay so this is super late and I don't even know why I thought about it, but I just realized that Connor and I never did the thing where we put eachother's names or initials in our instagram bios. I have a lot of opinions about that actually. Part of me loves it. If I'm dating someone, I want the whole world to know. Like if I'm watching a movie where their relationship is hidden, it just makes me mad because like why what's the point who cares. Unless there's like an actual valid reason, it just seems stupid. But it's another thing to basically announce it in your bio. Like nobody posts pictures of them and their significant other captioned: "we just started dating!", because that would be super awkward. I just think there's a fine line between it being cute and kind of cheesy, and it being lame and super cheesy. I know for sure Connor would go for it, but I haven't decided if it's something I want or not. Especially since I still need to decide if we're gonna stay together or not. It's one thing being away at college and not seeing him, but the quarantine adds a whole other level to it and it's just so complicated. I'm gonna ask Astrid about this sometime and get a second opinion.

Also recently I've been feeling less and less like I wanna write in my journal everyday. I think it's mostly because it's just become so negative. I sort of think about it like it's a reflection of my life, or at least the things most important. But if someone were to read this as it is right now, they would just think I'm super depressed and that there's nothing really good in my life. This is not true. Plus, even if it is a little bit true, so many people have it way worse. So I would just feel wrong if that was what people would think if they read my journal, not that anybody will be reading my journal. For now I'm gonna try to

write good things. I'm not saying it's like bad to write negative stuff, because I actually think it's pretty valuable, but if that's all that's there then I'm doing something wrong. Hopefully I can just try to find a balance between the negative and the positive. I might not do it every day, though.

April 1st

The weirdest thing happened today. I went into my backyard this morning and found it absolutely *packed* with confetti. It was the stupidest, most tv-sitcom moment I've ever had, but it made me laugh for the first time in days.

I stood there for like ten straight minutes, and then Gracie got out and started playing in the confetti, which really made the whole thing ten times funnier. And then there was laughing, and I looked up and saw Hugh on his balcony absolutely laughing his ass off.

I asked him if he did this, and he said yes. He had had confetti guns from a school event that never happened, and he had seen me getting more worried and depressed over the past few days (his words, not mine), and it's April Fool's Day, so he filled my backyard with confetti.

It's so stupid, but in the moment all I wanted to do was jump the balconies and give him a hug. Because it was the first direct human contact I've had in weeks, the first moment of genuine laughter that I've had in weeks, the first thing done in weeks that hasn't been for this pandemic.

Anyway, that's all that's happened today. All that's important, anyway. I just wanted to say something good.

~Astrid

April 2nd

Dad died today. On that bed in Central Park, at 3:34 am. They said he went more peacefully than most people around him, but maybe they're just saying that to make us feel better.

Dad was one of 198 people that died today. The death rate has increased to 1/2, and so I guess for him dying someone out there lived.

He was buried in a mass grave in a white box, and I didn't get to say goodbye or even see him before he went down. They gave his ventilator to someone else, and cleaned his bed and put another patient on it, and now it's like he was never there.

I want to go home. I don't want to be in this house anymore. I want to go home and sit in Dad's rocking chair and smell his cigarette smoke mixed with air freshener. I want to sit with him like I did when I was little, and have him hold me and tell me that it was okay to be scared, but that I need to be strong too. That strength comes from facing your fears, not defeating them.

I want my dad back.

But that's not going to happen. So instead I'm here, alone in this big empty house, and I guess that's it.

~Astrid

Coconut Breeze

Friday, April 3rd

to astridjkane

Astrid,

It's probably a good idea to start talking over email. Letter writing was fun and all, but not very practical considering the escalation of this virus. So I don't know how to react about your dad. Genuinely. I just don't know what to say other than I'm so so sorry. I know you were kind of expecting it, but still, the fact that it's reality and there's nothing you can do must be heartbreaking. Also the fact that he's literally on a bed in the middle of Central Park. It's very lucky that he has a ventilator, and I really wish the best for you all. Please keep me updated on what's going on with him, and know that I'm here if you need to talk about it, even though to be honest with you I'm terrible at comforting people.

Congratulations on getting into UPenn, though! That's awesome and super impressive. I doubt we'll be able to start school on campus, which totally sucks, but it's still an amazing accomplishment that you got in there.

I watched *Love is Blind* in about two days. I was so addicted and quarantine didn't give me anything better to do. When you're finished watching it, we should talk about it! I have some strong opinions. Also I can't believe you saw Connor! That's so crazy. He didn't mention you at all to me. I'm not really sure why he was at my house though. I didn't ask him to check up on it. I guess it's kind of sweet he did it then without me even asking. And yeah, he does have a striking look, it's mostly the eyes. They're like an icy blue that almost looks white. That's weird, though, that he didn't mention it to me. Maybe I'll ask him about it.

So I look forward to hearing from you soon!

-Natalie

Coconut Breeze

Friday, April 3rd

to astridjkane

Also, this is really Natalie, sorry about the weird email name. For some reason, a lot of people are named Natalie Smith so most of the good emails were taken.

Coconut Breeze

Friday, April 3rd

to astridjkane

Okay, I'm sorry. I was gonna wait longer before telling you about this but I feel like it's important enough that I just need to tell you.

So basically ever since I posted that note with my address on it at the corner of my street, I've been getting anonymous notes sent to me here in Palm Springs. I have no idea who's sending them, and at first I thought it was just a mistake, but now I'm pretty sure whoever is sending them is deliberately trying to mess with me. Or maybe it's a prank gone way too far, I don't know. But anyways, I'm pretty freaked out and the only person who knows about it right now is Connor. Last I talked to him he told me not to do anything about it yet because I'd only gotten three notes, but I just got another one ten minutes ago it's crazy. The person who wrote it knows what I look like right now. I'm freaked the fuck out.

Anyways, this is probably the last thing I should be talking about since we're literally living through a global pandemic killing millions of people, but I just don't know what to do. And if I'm being totally honest, part of me wonders if it's you who's sending it. I'm not accusing you, but I can't rule you out yet because you have the note, right, so unless somebody else wrote it down before you found it, you're the only one who could be writing it. Please don't be offended that I'm saying this, I really want to believe it's not you, I just can't eliminate that option yet.

-Natalie

Friday, April 3, 2020

Aaaaaand I got another note today. "Just so you know I think you're drop dead gorgeous. But I think you should wear your hair down more often, it really highlights your face, don'tcha think?" AHHHHHHH why. And on top of this things are starting to get really bad here in terms of the virus. Since there are so many old people, residences are freeing up like crazy because so many of them are dying. And unfortunately lots of the old people here are still going about their lives like nothing's going on which only makes them more susceptible. But so right now it's basically like all the old people here are getting wiped out and it's turning very apocalyptic. Like my uncle went on a grocery run yesterday and literally said he saw bodies on the street. I don't know if they were dead or just too weak to move, but it's too dangerous to help them because any contact is a huge risk of getting the virus. The government is just telling everyone to stay inside and avoid contact with any other humans, but apparently older people are in denial or something and they are just not listening.

So things aren't going too well right now for many reasons, but I decided to email Astrid to get our email chain going and to eventually talk about the creepy notes.

I also realized just after I sent the email that the name that's gonna appear in her inbox is really weird. And unless I said so right away she would have no idea it's from Natalie Smith. So I had to send a quick second email to clarify that. So now that I've written her the first email, I'll just wait until she responds and then later I'll bring up the creepy notes. Actually screw that.

I hope she doesn't think I'm crazy because I emailed her three times in a row. The second I get this girl's contact info I spam her! Oops! Oh well. So I ended up telling her in the third one about the creepy notes just because of the fourth note I got today. At this point it seems too important to be conscious of her thinking I'm weird. I literally have a stalker sending me notes about my hair, that's definitely more important than how she's gonna perceive me. Anyways, I need to know if it's her or not so that I can either block her ass

or get her to help me since she is now the only person I've told aside from Connor.

Speaking of Connor, I talked to him briefly on the phone last night and he told me about this girl that I know he used to kind of have a thing with. By thing I mean she consistently asked him out and he consistently friendzoned her. They were sort of friends to begin with and she always assumed he'd changed his mind so then she'd ask him out again. So last night out of the blue he told me he talked to her and decided to tell her to stop talking to him forever. My first reaction was that it seems a bit harsh. I mean like I haven't even heard her name in like a year, and all of a sudden he needs to cut her out of his life. I asked him why and he said she just started snapping him again and that she's immature and manipulative and the last thing he wants is for her to ruin what we have. He's sure she'll try.

I still think it's a bit much to just cut her off like that but I don't think there's a point in going back now. I mean I can't say I liked her, but it just seems like it wasn't totally necessary. Hopefully she doesn't get mad and come after me. OMG. Maybe she's the one sending the notes. If she's mad, and is obsessed with Connor, it would make sense for her to come after me, especially since Connor basically blocked her from his life to protect our relationship. wow. That could actually be the case. It doesn't explain how she would know what I look like though. I haven't seen her in like two years or something when she transferred schools. So it's probably not her. Also Connor only told her to stay away yesterday, so unless she could see the future, there's no way she could have had that motive previously.

Everytime I think I've maybe figured out who it is, I think it through and shut it down because it's just so unlikely.

April 3rd:

The subways closed today. I don't think anyone was taking them anyway. I saw pictures on the news, and the trains looked so clean when they were empty, even if they weren't. I guess at this point it was just taxing on the drivers to make them come in when no one was taking them. I guess it just wasn't worth it.

I named that big plant in the middle of the dining room table Brad. I don't know why, he just strikes me as a Brad. His leaves are getting bigger and greener, and I think it's the only thing in Manhattan striving right now. Maybe it's because I've been giving him lots of water and I moved him to a more sunlit room. I think I'm taking better care of this plant than myself.

I got myself into a super cleaning mode. I found the swiffer and the dusting spray underneath the bathroom sink and went around the house dusting every surface and vacuuming and swiffering everything, even all the individual stairs. I cleaned the toilet and bathtub and sink, and even the hair in the drain didn't gross me out.

I never knew how dusty a house could be. Now the whole place smells like chemicals and lemons and feels squeaky clean. I don't know if I like it like that, but I guess I feel more accomplished than I have in months.

I'm trying to teach Gracie more tricks, too. She already knows how to sit, but I'm trying to teach her how to roll over. It's not working out so well at the moment, but we're getting there.

~Astrid

Brad Update:

Brad has a new confetti hat. It's purple and made from Hugo's confetti.

Saturday, April 4, 2020

Astrid hasn't responded to my emails yet. It's kinda weird. I assumed that if she was giving me her email address, she'd be ready to talk more frequently, but I guess not.

I really miss Connor right now. I miss just cuddling up on the couch to watch a horror movie or something. I was thinking about getting him to come here and quarantine with us. I know my parents would say yes. My parents are like full on hippies in a way because they definitely have that "go with the flow" attitude about pretty much everything, including me. It comes across like they don't care, but it's more like they're just respecting my choices and giving me more independence, and letting me just be who I am and do what I want. On second thought, it's probably just that they don't care. Anyways, what I was saying about Connor is that I think it's totally possible in the parents allowing their kids to do something aspect, but I'm not sure how possible it is considering the virus. I ran the idea past Connor and he was super excited, but as soon as I said it I kind of regretted it because I see couples in quarantine and I don't think I'd be able to do it for longer than like a week. The thing is if Connor came here, he'd be here for a long time, so I think I'm gonna tell a huge lie and say my parents won't allow it. He probably won't even believe it, but oh well.

Saturday, April 4th

Today was an uneventful day. I'm trying to keep everything out of my mind, so I end up rolling around on the floor with Gracie for like five hours.

I cleaned out the backyard today. You know what I did? It's pretty stupid, but I did it. I picked up all of Gracie's poop and I threw it over the wall into Natalie's empty yard. If she ends up coming back and all of this is fixed I'll clean it all up, but for right now I don't think she's coming back anytime soon, so her yard has become the poop yard. I'm not going to tell her that.

I got all my friends to get on zoom and do a zoom prom. A zrom. It was a lot of fun. All the girls put on their prom dresses that we didn't get to wear in real life and the boys put on their collared shirts or a blazer... they looked a little less fancy than the girls, but whatever.

The dress I was supposed to wear was like a sparkly silver-purple. It was really pretty. I tried on like sixteen before I found the one I liked the best. It sucks that I don't get to wear it.

Instead I went into Jackie's closet and found her nicest dress. It's a red wraparound and it fit really well, so that's what I wore. Everyone wore jewelry and makeup for the first time in weeks, we drank wine and talked about all the stuff we don't get to talk about anymore. It was a good distraction.

My mom's not doing so well. She was put in government-mandated quarantine after she brought my dad in and she's going crazy. She didn't even get to see my dad before he was buried. I think being far away from him is one thing, but being with him through the whole thing and then not even being able to say goodbye is a complete different thing.

We've reached 5 million deaths in America. *5 million*. Just in America. That means 100 million or something worldwide. That means some huge number that I can't even comprehend. That's like a third of the US just disappearing. Well, not quite disappearing.

~Astrid

Brad Update:

A few of Brad's leaves are turning brown. :(

April 6th

People are getting desperate. The cashiers finally said "fuck that" today and stopped going in. I'm baffled that they didn't do that earlier. Yeah, they had protective gear and everything, and they were getting paid a lot more just to come in, but I'm not risking my life for some random people who need food and don't give two shits about me.

Everyone else is either working from home or stopped going into work weeks ago, when they realized that this thing was bad. Like bad bad. But the cashiers held it out for all of us, so I guess I should be thankful.

But you know what no more cashiers means? No more food. And that means robberies.

The grocery store down the street from me was robbed today. I'm so lucky I have enough food to last forever in here. I was on the back balcony and I heard an alarm, and I ran out to see people running down the cross street. I guess they were carrying food, I don't know. They didn't need to run from the alarm anyway, the police aren't going to show up. They have better things to do. They aren't risking their lives for people who just need food.

I finally got to the from Natalie today. Someone is sending her creepy typed notes. I don't know what they say exactly, but apparently they're super creepy and she seems to be really freaked out. She asked if it was me, which honestly would be stupid because I don't even know what she looks like or who she is at all, but I understand how it *could* be me.

I don't think that made sense. My point is, if I were her I'd suspect me, but as me I think suspecting me is stupid. Because I have no reason to do that. I guess I'll tell her all that, but more nicely.

~Astrid

Brad Update:

One of Brad's leaves fell off. It was an old one, though, so I'm not worried.

Sunday, April, 2020

Astrid finally responded to my email so we talked a lot today. She was pretty shocked about the creepy notes. I did kind of accuse her of sending them. It wasn't like a full on accusation, but I told her exactly what I was thinking. That I had suspicions it was her because it would make perfect logistical sense. But then thinking about her motive, she doesn't have one. That part makes no sense at all, so it would be a huge stretch to continue thinking it's her. It's obviously still possible, like there's no way for her to prove it's not her. But I guess all the arguments she made in the email show that it's not her. I'm running out of ideas. And I'm still not gonna tell anyone else.

Astrid Kane Monday, April 6th
to coconutbreeze

Hi Natalie,

Thanks so much for responding! I've been looking forward to your email for so long. I'm glad you got my final letter, I thought the mail would close before you got it.

Anyway, that's super creepy. I can't believe someone is sending you stalker letters. That's so unnecessary right now. Aren't they worried about the pandemic?

I get why you think it's me. I would think it was me if I were you, because all your evidence makes sense. But I swear it's not me. I didn't even know you existed before this. I don't know why I would send you creepy letters (I don't know why anyone would send you creepy letters though). I haven't seen you in real life. I don't know how else to defend myself other than to say I really have no reason to do that. That's not a very good defense, I know, but it's all I got.

Also, I didn't want to say this because then maybe you'll feel like I'm trying to get pity from you or something, which I'm totally not, but you're the only person I've told about this and I've gotta tell someone. Don't take this as a "she's sad so I've gotta forgive her" because that's an obvious manipulation. I'm not manipulating people I promise.

My dad died yesterday. I was going to say "passed away" but that's too formal and fake-sounding. He died. He's dead. He's in a box in a mass grave in Central Park. I just had to tell someone to get it off my chest. Sorry. Don't feel bad, I'll be okay. I just had to tell someone.

Let me know about the stalker stuff. That's super creepy and maybe I can help you figure out who it is. I doubt I'd know them, but you never know, right? That sounded suspicious, I swear it isn't me lmao.

~Astrid <3

Astrid Kane Monday, April 6th
to coconutbreeze

By the way, you don't have to apologize or feel bad about my dad. I just wanted to let you know because you wanted updates. I don't really want to talk about it anyway.

Let me know about your freaky stalker. That's way more interesting.

Coconut Breeze

Tuesday, April 7th

to Astrid

Jeez I'm soooooo sorry to hear that I don't even know what to say. I totally get that you don't wanna talk about it. If you ever change your mind about that, let me know. Hopefully I can help a bit although I said before I've never been very good at comforting people.

As for the creepy notes, I'm still sorry I asked if it was you, but I just had to. I couldn't rule you out right away, especially since technically I barely know you so for all I know you are a crazy stalker with a pile of bodies hidden in your closet. Not likely, though. So anyways I do believe you, and thank you for telling me all that.

Astrid Kane

Tuesday, April 7th

to Natalie

I can't believe I forgot to tell you about the letter I got! The other day, when I was coming back from getting food for the cats I found a letter on the same lamppost that you taped your letter on. It had the same exact design on it that your did (though not as nicely drawn lmao it was like a 2-year-old drew it) and inside all it said was "get away from her." Super creepy, right? I think they're talking about you but idk because how could this person know that I was the one that got your letter?

Anyway, I can assure you that I do NOT have a pile of bodies in my closet. Or anywhere else. :)

Coconut Breeze Tuesday, April 7th
to Astrid

Okay wtf this is actually crazy. Like I'm starting to just be really scared. Do you think our notes are from the same person? I guess it partly makes sense since we're both getting them at the same time, but like we don't really know each other so how could we possibly have someone in common who's evil and sending us terrifying notes??

Astrid Kane

Tuesday, April 7th

to Natalie

Yeah I don't see how it could be the same person, we don't know the same people. Still the person was obviously talking about you, otherwise they wouldn't make it exactly like your letter, would they? Maybe they don't like that we're talking or something?

Don't jump on me for this, but could it be Connor? I don't want to accuse him of anything but I met him a few days ago and he knows we've been communicating, and he knows where you are.

Coconut Breeze Tuesday, April 7th
to Astrid

Not to be like super stubborn but there's no way it's Connor. Trust me, I'm a very rational person. I like to think things through and decide what's most logical. That's how I know it's not Connor. He loves me so much, even though we're having some relationship difficulties right now doesn't mean he's gonna send me terrifying stalker notes and lie to me about it. He's the only person other than you who knows about these notes and also, as soon as I explained it to him he suggested that I show them to the cops right away. Why the hell would he suggest that if he was the one sending them, that would be like turning himself in? Also, and I of course love him, but I don't think he's smart enough to send those notes, honestly. But like I mean that in a good way. Like he's not evil-smart like someone would need to be to send notes like these. So please believe me, it's not him. Are there any other people that we have in common?

Astrid Kane

Tuesday, April 7th

to Natalie

Okay yeah I guess you're right, it would be super stupid of him to call the cops if he was doing it. And I trust you to know your boyfriend. But I really don't know who else it could be. I don't think there's anyone else that we've both met unless it's someone we don't know we both know.

Tuesday, April 7th

I've been emailing with Natalie. I told her about the weird note I found pinned to the lamppost but we can't figure out who it might be.

I suggested Connor, because I met him and told him I knew about Natalie, and then the next day I got a message saying "get away from her," so it would make sense, right? But Natalie is convinced it's not him, and she knows him much more than I do. I think she'd know if he was creepy right? I don't know. I've never known anyone to send creepy letters.

Anyway, I don't see why it would be him. I talked to him for like 3 minutes so I don't know why he'd go off on me.

Anyway, I don't know who else it could be. If they're the same person then they need to know both of us, but maybe they're not the same person? Maybe the letter wasn't meant for me. I don't know. Maybe Natalie's trying to freak me out.

I don't think so, but it's weird.

~Astrid

Brad Update:

Brad's drinking more water lately. He absorbs it a lot faster than usual.

Tuesday, April 7, 2020

So today she told me her dad died. I have to say, I'm not surprised. With the current death rate, I'm shocked I haven't heard of more people close to me who've died from it. Actually now that I think about it, there are a bunch of people at the school who died. Only about three students, but I think there have been nine teachers. I think most of the people fled to their country houses in Long Island or Massachusetts or whatever. I guess it's a bit better over there in terms of coming into contact with people, but at the same time, half of the teachers who died were out there but the hospital situation just sucks so they didn't get good treatment. There just aren't enough medical resources out there.

There's a lot of people I know at my dad's office that are dying. Some of the stories I've heard are just awful, about women who just had babies and had to deliver them in their homes. Then somehow they come into contact with the virus and the babies die. It's awful. Some people are becoming totally numb to all the tragedy at this point. I guess it makes sense since the numbers are so high. But it shouldn't be normalized.

Anyways I was not prepared to comfort her about her dad because I'm awful at it. I decided to just say that in the email. At least she won't assume I just don't care. I told her that if she does want to talk about it, I still can, but I have a feeling she won't wanna talk about it anyways. It's pretty touchy, and she strikes me as someone who acts really tough, but actually takes things pretty hard. She won't want to break down talking to me about her feelings. And she's obviously devastated, so what's talking to me gonna do?

She accused Connor of sending the creepy notes. I was actually shocked. I mean first of all she doesn't even know him. She only knows the things I've told her, and they've basically only been good things, so I just don't get where she got the idea from. It's such a stretch. I guess technically it is possible, but in the same way that it could be my mom sending the notes. It's not impossible, but it's so unlikely that I'm not even considering it.

Anyways, I didn't want to like attack her for suggesting that because it's not like there are any better ideas, but I definitely have to shut it down. She can't go around thinking my boyfriend is sending me super creepy stalker notes.

It also just doesn't make sense, like what would he get out of it? If anything he wants to be closer to me, and doing this would definitely push me away. Okay and the last thing is that as soon as I told him, he suggested I eventually show the cops. If he was writing them, that would literally be like turning himself in. He's definitely not smart enough to fool the cops.

Coconut Breeze

Wednesday, April 8th

to Astrid

The only person I can think of is Hugo, my neighbor. The thing is I really doubt it's him, though. I don't know him that well, but from what I do know he's really nice. The one time he creeped me out was when I was taping the note to the streetlamp and when I turned around to go home I saw him watching me from his second floor window. It was only weird because when I looked up at him, we locked eyes but then before I could like wave or something he walked away. Other than that, though, I've literally only ever had pleasant interactions with him But also that creepy moment may just have seemed creepy for whatever reason. Like he could have just genuinely been wondering what I was doing outside since it was pretty quiet in the streets at that point. Maybe he was just curious.

Coconut Breeze

Wednesday, April 8th

to Astrid

I'm not sure how close you are with him now, but I remember you telling me that you were talking to him through the windows or something. So maybe???

Astrid Kane

Wednesday, April 8th

to Natalie

Yeah that's a valid point but I really don't think it's him. I've been talking to him a lot and he doesn't seem like that type of person at all. The only time I think he even mentioned your name was when I said I was writing to you. I see what you mean though. A lot of his actions do have that vibe of being super sweet or a bit creepy. Like, he pranked me for April Fools Day, which is sorta sweet if you look at it in a way where he wants to cheer me up, but sorta creepy if you look at it as an almost-stranger thinking he's super close to his neighbor. I still don't think it's him, because his actions seem genuine, but I can subtly ask him about you if you want.

Coconut Breeze

Wednesday, April 8th

to Astrid

Yeah sure, you may as well. I'm not really sure what you should ask him about me specifically but go ahead. Let me know what he says. Also for convenience, my number is (917)-867-5309. Awesome right?! So shoot me a text. It's not as glamorous as letters and emails, but it's much faster.

Wednesday, April 8th

I'm so tired. I'm so tired of all of this shit. I want everything to go back to normal and I want to go home and I want my dad to be alive. I want to go back to worrying about college and what dress I'll wear to June's next party. I want to worry about who I'll hug when I graduate and who to bring to prom. That's what I want to worry about. Not dying.

Natalie said it could be Hugo, but I don't think it is. He's been super sweet to me and I don't think he's even mentioned Natalie. Then again, if he really did speak to her even once, I would expect him to say that when I brought her up. Instead he implied he never knew her in the first place. I should have realized that sounded weird because they're neighbors.

I don't know. I'll talk to him about it. I'll ask him about Natalie and I'll see if I can do it subtly. If it's not him, then I don't think he'll be suspicious or anything.

~Astrid

Brad Update:

Brad's got a new leaf coming in. It's small and very green.

wednesday, April 8, 2020

I'm feeling less and less like writing this journal. I'm gonna try to write about something positive. The best part of my days has been making my coffee in the mornings. I typically don't like drip coffee because it's just kind of blah. Like it doesn't really taste **good**, you know. So eventually I got super sick of having that every day here. I actually went without coffee for like a week. It was really hard, I think I was probably super annoying to everyone because I was just kind of mad all week.

So one day I was just complaining to my mom about how awful the drip coffee is and how we need to order an espresso machine ASAP, and she obviously said no to that, but she did give me a temporary solution. I say temporary because there is no way this is the only coffee I'm gonna drink for the rest of my life. So it's like this small metal pot that you fill with water and grounds and then you put it on the stove. It's actually really simple, and it's way stronger than drip coffee which is an added bonus.

So every morning I make a pot of this strong coffee and drink it myself and then I convince myself I don't need another because at that point I've basically had the same amount of caffeine as I would get if I had four shots of espresso. I hope all this insane virus stuff ends soon so I can have a real latte or cappuccino. Oh and also so that people stop dying everywhere and stuff.

I tried to be positive. It didn't really work.

Also I was talking to Astrid over email about who could be sending the notes and after we resolved the Connor idea, we started wondering about my neighbor, Hugo. Apparently they've sort of been talking. I don't see any motive, though, although I do remember him being sort of creepy. IDK!

Astrid 🍷🌞🍌★

hey it's astrid. is this natalie?

April 9th

yeah hi! so was it weird texting this number?

what?

gonna be honest idk what you're talking about

Tommy Tutone - 867-5309/Jenny

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WTdTwcmxyo>

ohh ok that makes sense

idk that song but i'll listen to it!

by the way what's ur favorite color

*cool it's a great song
green. why?*

i'm trying to decide what emoji to put next to your name

*oh gotcha
what's yours?*

yellow

ok i'm gonna put some yellow ones then

i'm giving you a green heart 🍷

*dope!
so how's it going?*

yeah idk

obviously prob not too good considering what you're going thru

my mom just got it but she actually has a hospital room

and she's been bitching about her roommate

Imao well i bet it's nice to have something trivial to complain about

yeah it gets my mind off things

have you gotten any more notes?

yeah i did :((

:(

it said

"be careful who you trust. it's hard to trust anyone these days"

that's so scary!

ew

what kind of person would say that

no idea

sorry to do this but can we talk tomorrow?

it's getting pretty late over here

oh right i forgot about the time difference

we can snap tomorrow!

mine is @astridkane

ok i'll add u. gn



Friday, April 10th

Mom's got it. Mom's got it. Mom's got it.

She called me today. She has a room. She's not like Dad, who was stuck outside in Central Park with barely enough blankets to stay warm. She's got a hospital room that she's sharing with one other woman who also has it. Mom says that the woman is driving her mad, because she's coughing all the time and moaning and yelling at the doctors and "being a bitch about it." Mom's words, not mine.

Mom's never been one to show any suffering. I could tell that she was sick just by the way she talked, but there was no way in hell she was going to tell me that. I asked her how it felt, and she just said "not great" and moved on. Maybe she knows that if she complained I wouldn't be able to handle it. She's not going to take it, like my dad. This thing killed her husband, it's not killing her too.

I'm not as worried about my mom. She's a strong woman, and she's healthy. She'll go down fighting if she goes down at all. Aunt Hazel got it and survived, so Mom can too. I'm scared because she's my mom, and she's sick, and she has a 50% chance of dying, but she also has a 50% chance of living, and for my mom that's "more than enough."

So I'm not as worried. I'm not as worried. I'm not as worried.

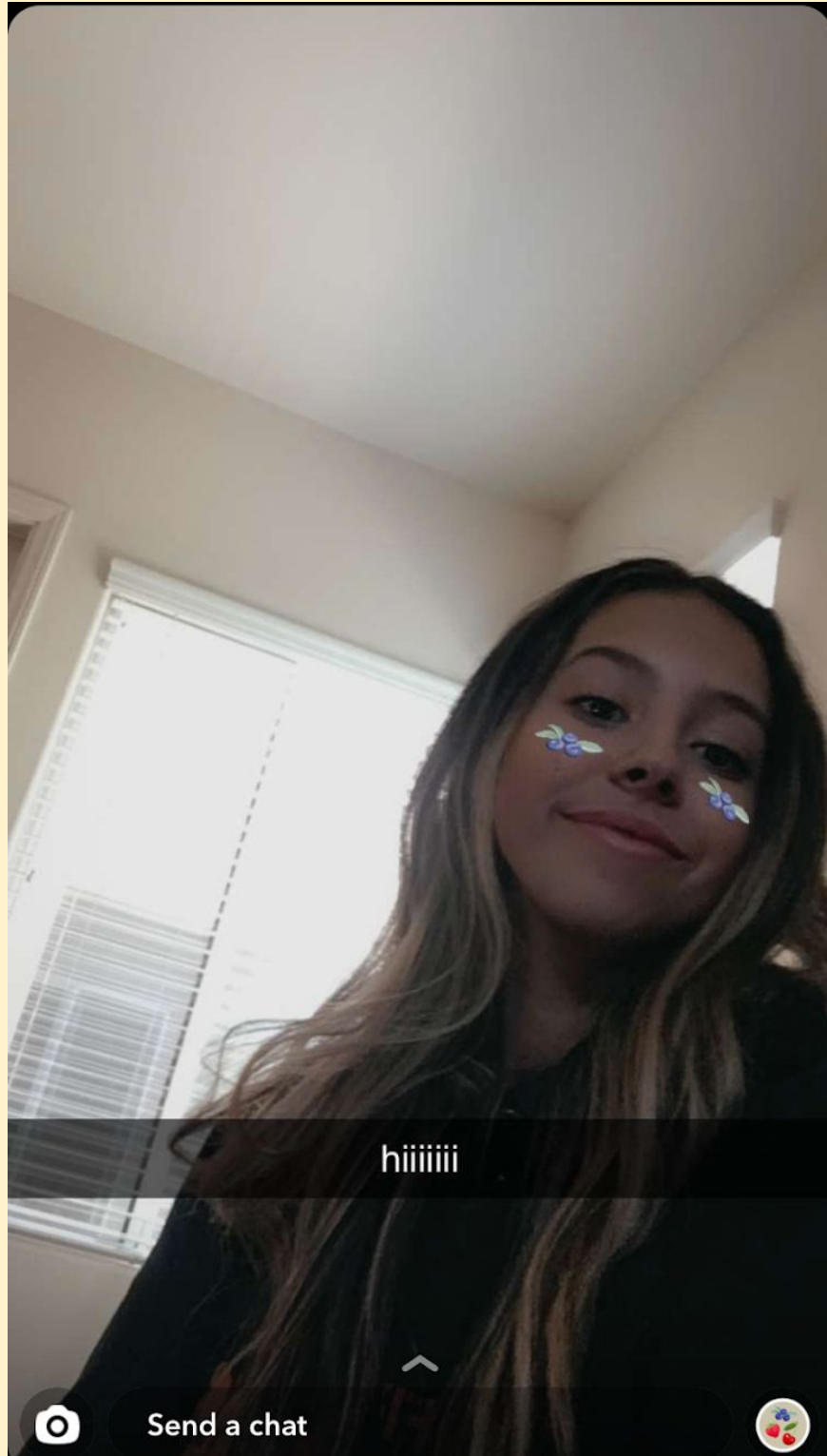
I got Natalie's phone number today. She has the same phone number as in a song? I've never heard the song but she thought it was super cool and so I listened to it for her.

I also got her snapchat. I haven't said anything yet because we're texting about the creepy notes, but it's gonna be super weird to finally see her. I wonder if she'll look how I think she'll look. I guess I have a picture of her in my head, but not really. I haven't really thought about it. I wonder if I look like she thought. I don't know.

~Astrid

Brad Update:

The little leaf is getting bigger.



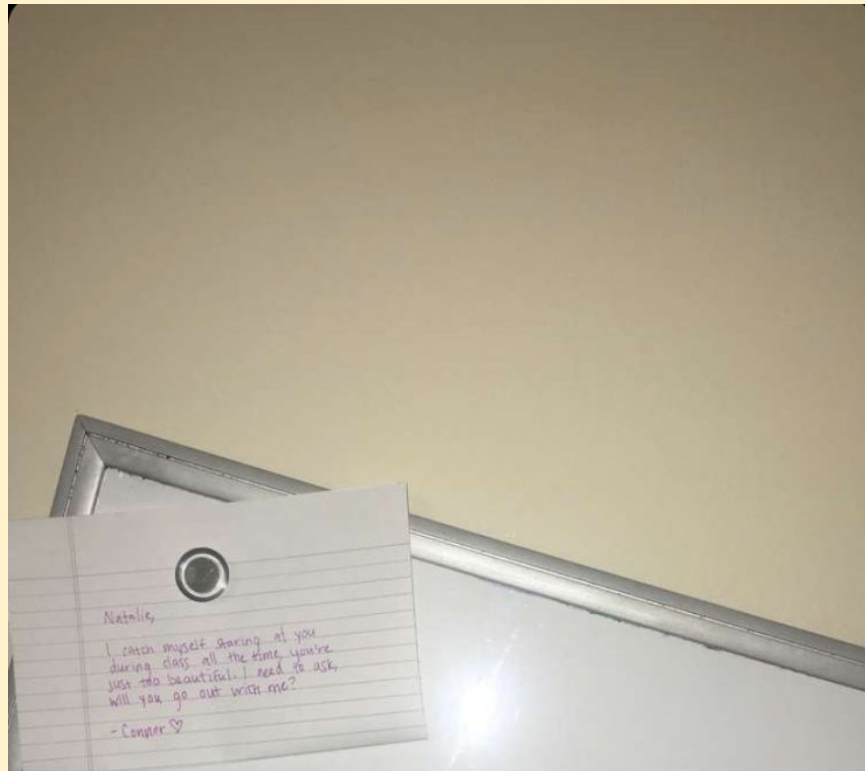
April 11th



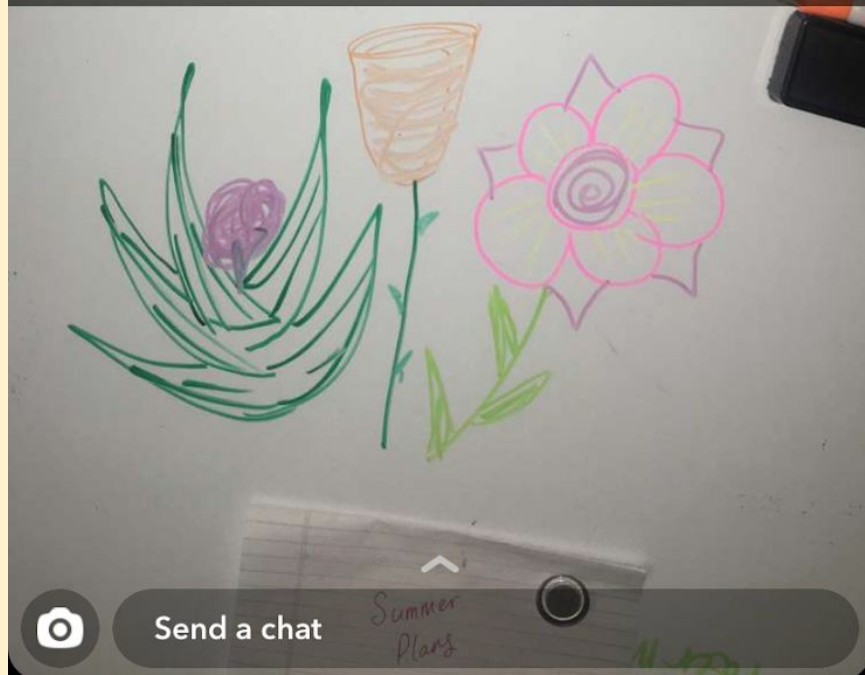


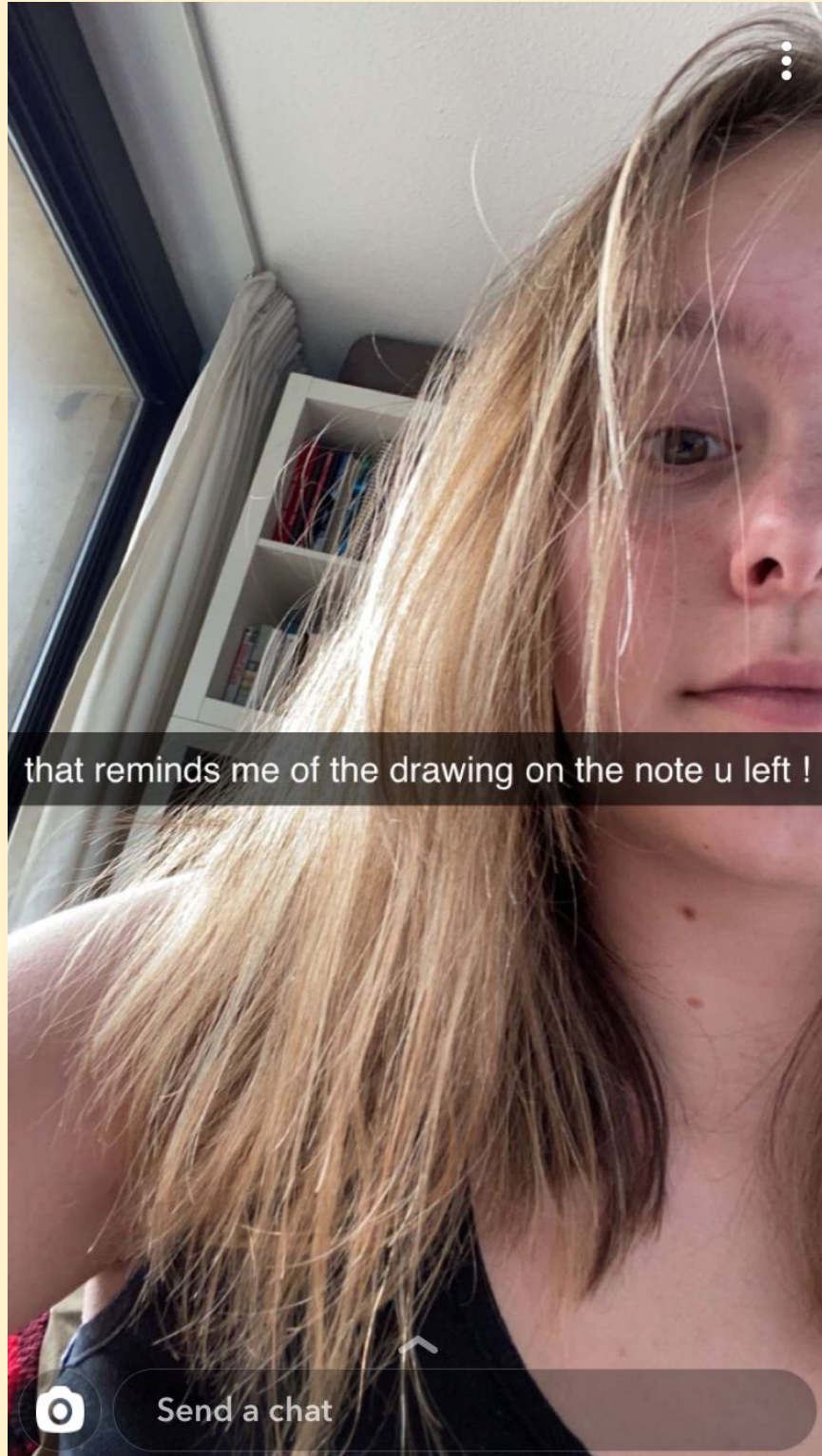






look at this drawing i did i was so bored 🤔





that reminds me of the drawing on the note u left !



Send a chat





yeah! it's super cute right??



Natalie,

I catch myself staring at you
during class all the time, you're
just too beautiful. I need to ask,
will you go out with me?

- Connor ♡

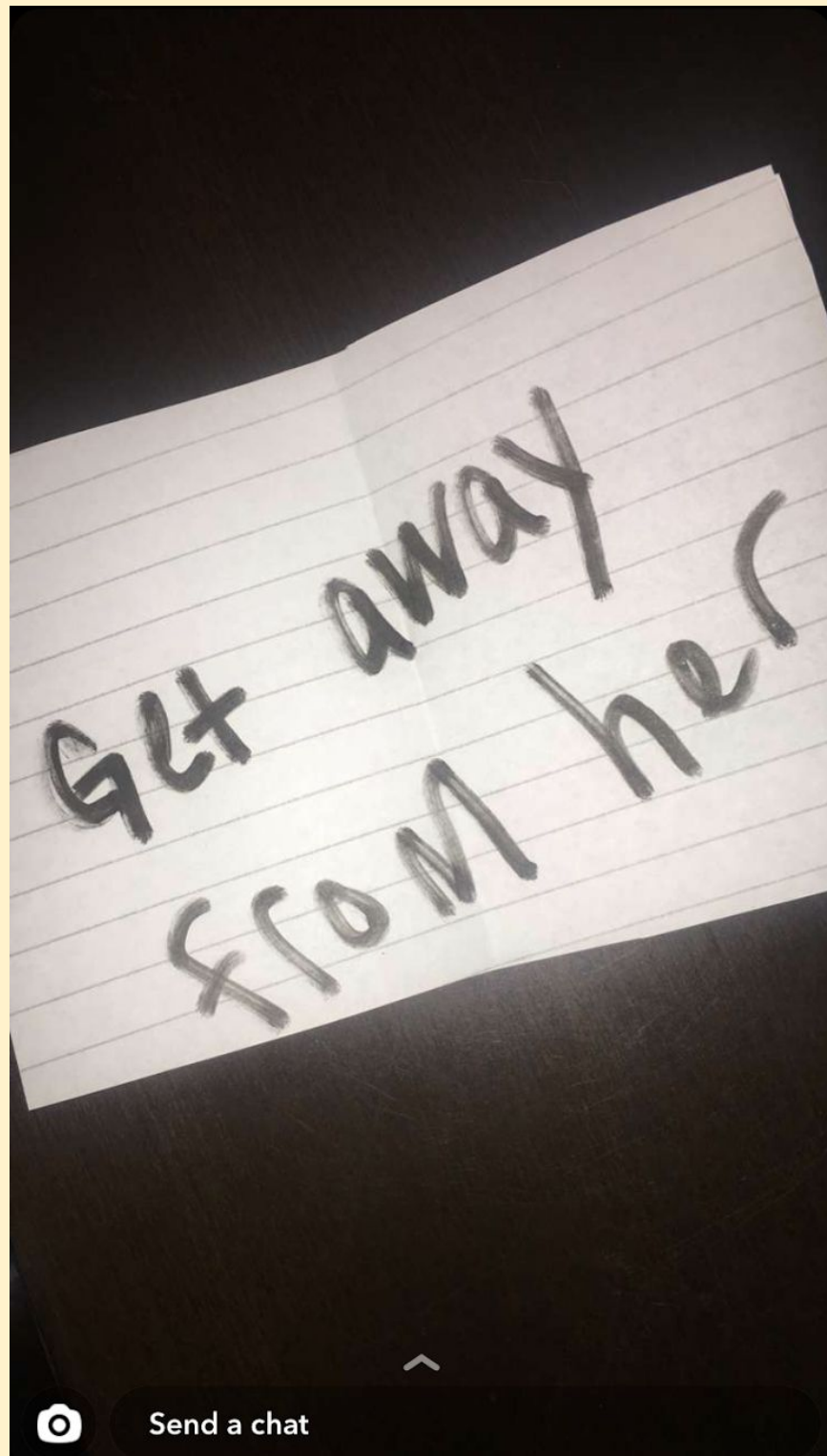
this is how he asked me out 2.5 yrs ago 🥰



Send a chat









nat it's the same handwriting

Send a chat



Friday, April 11, 2020

I don't know what to say.

She was right. It is Connor. Connor was the one sending me the notes. I'm honestly too in shock to really think about it right now. But oh my god. Maybe he's not. Astrid is totally certain he is, but maybe if I go over the facts again. So basically when I was snapping with Astrid, the note Connor gave me when he asked me out was in the background. She commented on it, so I sent her a close up picture. I thought she was just gonna say it was cute. Then she freaked out because she said she knew that handwriting. She sent me a few snaps about it and then started calling me until I finally picked up. She explained that the handwriting was EXACTLY the same and that she wouldn't make this accusation again if she wasn't sure.

This is crazy. She'd right. Plus, now that I look back on the messages, who says "don'tcha think"???? Nobody says that. Except for Connor, and the person who was sending me those notes. He knew I wouldn't take the notes to the cops, and that they're too busy with this virus to deal with something like that. That's why he suggested it. I mean it worked. It made me believe there was no way it was him. Jeez.

I've been in my room all day. I'm worried the second I go anywhere I'll throw up. Astrid's been sending me messages all day but I'm really not in the mood to talk right now. Connor's been sending me messages as well. I'm trying not to let him know that I know. If he finds out, I think he'll get scared that I'll turn him in or something and do something bad. I don't know what.

Also, everytime I write his name into this journal I either start crying or almost pass out. I think I need to stop. Maybe not completely, but at least a bit. I'm gonna take some breaks from this journal.

Last thing, I'm going to talk to Astrid at some point and ask her to check my house in New York. She said she saw him standing around my house, and I definitely did not ask him to do that. I need her to make sure he didn't burn it down or flood it or something.

Friday, April 11th:

Oh my god it's Connor. Connor is the one sending creepy letters to Natalie and stalking him. I finally snapchatted her and saw her face and she looked a lot like I thought she would, but not exactly. I guess that's expected though.

But it's Connor. I was right. This whole time the person harassing her was Connor. And how did I figure it out? Because of his fucking handwriting. I was snapchatting her and she had this whiteboard up in her room with a little note pinned to the corner. I asked her to see it, because it was kinda cute from what I could see, and then I recognized the handwriting.

It was the same handwriting as on the note on the lamppost. It was the same handwriting as on that threatening letter I found. What does this even mean? Natalie said he was the nicest person ever, that he loved her. How can people not see these things coming?

Whatever, I don't even know what to think. I don't know him. I've met him once and barely spoke ten words to him.

Natalie is freaking out though. I get it. I mean, I don't get it, but I can kind of imagine. I guess. I don't know. She won't respond to my texts though. I just want to make sure she's okay. I feel like I shouldn't have said anything; imagine meeting a person and then they tear your relationship apart. I guess nothing would have changed if I hadn't been there, maybe I'm just delaying the inevitable, but it doesn't feel good.

~Astrid

Brad Update:

I moved him next to a window. He's been thriving lately. He has a bunch of other little plants around him now, but I haven't named them.

Saturday, April 12, 2020

ok. I can't take it anymore. It's only been a day. But I need to talk to Connor. Actually, not talk to him. I need to scream at him. I don't care about his reaction. What's he gonna do, fly to Palm Springs during a global pandemic? It's decided: I'm gonna confront him.

So I called him. Regular call, not facetime. I didn't wanna see his stupid face. He sounded pretty roughed up or something. Just really slow and almost slurring his words. He definitely wasn't drunk or anything but maybe on drugs? I have no idea. I don't care.

I'm usually so scared when it comes to confronting people, and honestly I was this time, too—until I heard his voice. "Hey, cutie! Haven't heard from you in a few days." He's completely clueless. He totally sucks. Hearing him call me cutie just like he did in one of the notes triggered me. I went off on him, and I didn't care at all what he was thinking. He didn't try to defend himself once I was done. He claimed that anything he did was to protect me. He said he was doing it because he loved me. He was worried that Astrid was gonna get in the way of us, or betray me like Belinda. He never apologized. Well, he did give me one of those non-apologies "I'm sorry you feel that way."

At one point I felt like I was gonna throw up so I went and sat in my bathroom. I didn't actually get sick until he told me how excited he was to see me and hug me. Jeez that was awful. I can't even imagine being in the same room as him, let alone touching him. Ugh. I'm gonna throw up again.

So when we were talking—well, more like I was yelling and interrogating him—I realized something that made me think maybe it's not him. Even though he literally wasn't denying it. He actually admitted to it. Anyways it must be one of those things that happens when you're in a crazy situation like this where you find out your boyfriend of three years was sending you super creepy stalker notes. That kinda thing. So anyways what I realized was that the mail closed at some point, but the letters still came. How could they have been getting here if the mail closed? Connor definitely wasn't in Palm Springs, and assured me of this. When I asked him, he said that he was sorry to admit that Belinda was

helping him. He'd email her the messages, then she'd print them and deliver them to my house, while still making it look like they were delivered in the mail. Damn, she really is an awful person. I didn't even ask how he got her to do it. Honestly, she's so petty she probably offered to help. But still, since when did Connor talk to her??? There's so much I don't know about this dude, and I don't care to learn it. Ever.

Towards the end of the call he asked me how I found out. I explained how Astrid put two-and-two together and figured it out. That made him pretty mad. Not at me, but at Astrid. He kept saying she better watch her back, and that she should have kept her mouth shut. Pretty cliché stalker talk if you ask me, but I do think they're valid threats. When I hung up the phone, the first thing I did after blocking his number and all other ways he had to contact me was tell Astrid to stay away. I told her that he's a psychopath and that he's probably gonna come attack her or something.

Also, now I'm really worried about the fact that he was just hanging around outside my house that time Astrid saw him. I'm worried he like trashed my room or stole my jewelry. I think I'll ask Astrid just to stop by and check to make sure things are okay at my house. She should be fine, unless he's actually like living there. I doubt it, though.

Sunday, April 13th

Natalie confronted Connor today. She didn't tell me everything, and I didn't ask her to. She seemed really shaken by the whole encounter. Apparently he turned on her, and he was just something completely different than usual.

Apparently he's been using Nat's ex-friend Belinda to deliver the messages. I don't know why she complied; why would anyone agree to deliver random messages in the middle of a global pandemic? Is she still that pissed at how things ended between her and Nat? How petty.

Anyway, Natalie seemed really scared at how angry he got. Actually, she didn't say angry, just "scary." I don't really know what that means but I'm imagining yelling. She just seemed really freaked out. Apparently he said something about coming after me because I "ruined his plan." Natalie told me to check up on her house. After all, she never asked him to check up on it, but I saw him out there. That's some creepy shit. When I saw him he was just standing there, watching her house like he expected her to come around the corner any moment. Maybe he wanted her to. I don't know.

But then I ruined his daydream, and now he's "coming to get me," or whatever. Natalie said be careful. She's worried he trashed it or something. I guess I'll find out.

Oh God I shouldn't have gone over there. I think it was the worst thing I've ever seen. Nothing was touched on the outside, but the door was unlocked so I just went in. I guess Connor knew where her spare key was hidden. So I went inside and the whole place was a mess. Just... trashed. Just like Natalie had worried about.

I went upstairs. The house has a similar layout to mine so I went upstairs to look for Natalie's room. I wanted to leave but something told me to keep going. I shouldn't have listened.

I went up to the top floor and found Natalie's room. Connor was there. Or, I guess, his body was. His face was completely blue and he was lying on the floor next to Natalie's bed, hugging one of her sweatshirts. His eyes were wide open and they looked so creepy. I can't believe I thought they were "intense" when I first met him. I guess I was right, just not in the right way.

There were blood stains on his mouth and chin and all over the floor around his head and I think he coughed up blood and died. God it was so disgusting. The smell was nauseating and I went home and puked. I don't know what to do about it. I wish I hadn't gone over there at all.

But I guess then I'd be scared of Connor coming to find me. I guess I don't have to be anymore.

Oh, and my mom died today. Got the call a few minutes ago. At least she outlived that bitchy roommate she had, if only by a day. I like to think she finally got to relax in quiet, and just died.

It's been a shitty fucking day, and I'm done writing about it.

~Astrid

Sunday, April 13, 2020

So Astrid just called me. It was like a weird mixture of her half crying and throwing up throughout the call. She was telling me what happened when she went to check up on my house. I was right, it was completely trashed. Oh, and Connor's dead. She found his disgusting and diseased body in my bedroom, holding onto one of my hoodies. Gonna have to burn that if I ever go back there.

I can't imagine finding that. Every time she tried to describe it she threw up. She was literally calling me from her bathroom floor. That's nasty. I feel bad. I'm kinda the person who told her to go in and check. But I definitely did not expect her to find that. Jeez.

She seemed to be concerned for me when she called. She kept asking if I was okay. Obviously no, I'm not okay. But I also know she's going through a ton of stuff way worse than this. At least when I lost Connor he'd already been gone for a while. It wasn't like I loved him anymore. You kinda lose that feeling when you find out the person you love is sending you super creepy notes, and that they truly believed it was the right thing to do.

Astrid and I are both going through a bunch of stuff right now, and most of it totally sucks. We've agreed that we're gonna take a break from the journals. We're gonna talk to each other when we need to, but we're gonna take a bit of a break from that as well. It feels weird to have a friendship based completely on tragedy and disaster. We'll talk again when things are better. Hopefully it isn't too long.

So, goodbye journal. I hope to see you again someday. Peace,
-Natalie