

F.I.F.

by

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## ABSTRACT

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F.I.F.

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Jeffrey DeShell

Cassie Catacombs is an up and coming celebrity in the near future. Her band, F.I.F. (Future is Femme) blows up and becomes synonymous with politics, ambition, musical genre and music technology. F.I.F. becomes a new music platform, like Spotify or Apple Music, which is installed inside the head, a problematic controversy.

What is included here is part one of a three-part novel. Part one is Cassie's diary, taken during her upcoming tour, the beginning curve of fame. Part two is a compilation of press about F.I.F. Part three is testimony from her producer, who has been writing and arranging these texts from prison.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
II.	PART 1.....	1
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	64

## INTRODUCTION

We all know about Cassie Catacombs and what became of F.I.F.

Over the course of nearly four decades, Cassie became an icon of artistry and individuality. Few musicians have defined and redefined dub, e, rock and pop, and nearly every other musical genre, like her.

F.I.F. stood for The Future is Femme. Cassie Catacombs and DJ Brandie Vice's original vision was simple: throw the party everyone is invited to. On that mission, they would go on to build a music empire. Hundreds of their songs have topped streaming charts. At the peak of F.I.F., Cassie created a new music platform, which ultimately, as you know, became her destruction.

But I don't want that to be all we remember.

Cassie was an icon, but she was more than that. She was a lethal believer, a femme who went against the grain.

During the streaming era, it was impossible to keep up with new music. Back then it was like playing poker, and all the cards were wild. Everyone was an artist. Everyone had a platform. Everyone had the tech to make decent sounding compilations. And there were a billion names to remember. Way more supply than demand. Go for broke was just the reality, not a motivational sentiment.

Cassie changed all that because she wasn't like the rest of them— content on traveling across the land, projecting webs in midnight establishments, just to be dull and dream sick in the morning.

She changed the game. She came on the scene at exactly the right time, when the only “big” acts were reboots— superhero blockbusters, low-risk, high-shit propositions. She provided the odd sense of spirit that had been lost. And it was almost frightening. Watching her, thoughts loosened and you were sold on the heartache.

And now, as my shame and anguish and puzzlement about the horrific aftermath of F.I.F. compounds... I'll never forgive myself for what happened to her... I need tell everyone the truth— who she was and what she stood for. She wasn't the apocalyptic monster the news makes her out to be.

When Cassie knew when it was The End, she left me these writings. I've made it my task to arrange them, edit them, fill in the blanks as I can. As I compose, the facts seem to impose themselves on things, kind of like a software. I had the F.I.F. platform removed like everyone else, but I'm left with a vague displacement, the remnants, the songs. What's buried here seems to be self-evolving.

I've arranged this text in three parts. The first part is Cassie's journal from her breakout tour. The second part is comprised of the prominent reviews, feature articles and interviews with her. The third part is my testament to what happened. As executive producer of F.I.F., I apologize to everyone, especially Cassie.

Cassie, this is for you.

## PART 1

5/15 Washington, DC - 9:30 Club

Morning

It's my first time on a national tour, and it's such a wandering thing.

In the hover, images unpeel on each side, and I become increasingly tranquil and detached as we approach the venue. Everything is falling into place, opening for Woo. I grew up listening to Sandra Shelly (Woo), and I admire her. I wonder what she's like up close, how she looks like in sweatpants with her makeup off. How she handles small, inconsequential things.

The story always pulls me toward these wonderful details, which I'll need to provide if ever want to gain recognition. I know that getting noticed isn't so much about the music; it's more about the accessibility of it. Can people see me, and when they seem me, is their overactive fantasy ignited?

B is asleep next to me. I hardly understand how they can rest right now. All the nights we've stayed up late making awesome arrangements to relocate to the pop star universe. All those nights have accumulated to now. And they're asleep.

Tonight we'll be the brain of the city, powering everything. I feel that power and its massive energy, like a wind pulsing, an arterial throb, burning through the unimaginable darkness of a crowd's collective dream. Anything can happen in this darkness— in the music— and its huge mental accelerator. Here, natural law, if

there ever was such a thing, is held in suspension. My heel taps staccato thinking about it, and my shoulders become conscious with the braid of blitz.

Only a few months ago, B and I were performing to web crowds of 10 in basements, parks, and dives. The way things have gone from zero to million so quickly. I've changed completely as a person in a three-month period. I quit my job, went to Femme Riot, and landed this tour. Now we have the chance to become massive. And, honestly, I'm terrified.

We have the opportunity to launch everywhere at once, but what if nobody looks or responds?

B always says, "It doesn't matter what they think." I suppose they are right. I also know that my insecurity is unreasonable, the way I want everyone to love me. That and how low self-esteem becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The fear of failure ultimately leads to planning for it.

The pressure to produce material is also so intense. Bands pump out as much material as possible to stay current, to move with audiences and their everydays. An EP for studying, songs to fuck to, fast songs about fucking, the cooking songs. It's nauseating.

The way music is always moving, like thinking. Sometimes it moves with me, sometimes not with me, the femme in the hover over, B beside me, sleeping. The trouble is trying to track it. Bibliography and book history. The concealed nature of fact. All that stands in place of magnificent confessions. Euphoria, that splitting sermon, hornlike, is impossible to think about. There's no object to it because our

minds and worlds are the same thing. All sides sway toward an edge. The line begins with theme, but it shimmers beneath the ground.

Outside, Spring is at its hinge. Brush and hills and fields combine, and above, in the strung-out sky, an eerie smog blurs. It evokes a feeling that's deserted but not static. It comes and goes in time and breeze.

Most the time I hardly know where I am or when. But it's always punctuated by moments like this, of unpleasant liveliness, tingling at my bones, faintly at first and then thumping. To be honest, I'm not anything. I'm nobody. And so much worse, I know anything can be reduced to this.

In a way, that's what making music is all about. It's about ruins. It's about defeating the purpose. I've completely fucked my life for this. I don't live anywhere. I don't see my friends. I don't have a day job to return to. I've had to sacrifice routine, relationships, all the comforts people like. But the pay-off. The pay-off is.

Washington DC. Ok, we're here.

It's smug. Ozone rumor. Diesel American tang.

Smells like politics.

And wow, so many webs. Images so ample you can barely see the sights and structures. Violent images of kids being shot by police and other kids. The cartoon

president with his mouth full of flames. Scandal and personal testimony, echoing and distorting. Everywhere. In windshields, mirrors, on eyes and skin.

With so many emotions but no vocabulary to fill them. No track to set them on right. No healing procedure. The violence in impact, it warps. These accidents, I think more and more, become the life, the story, that can be read on the body. The body is where everything becomes whole, but where we struggle most to look.

I don't know if music helps. Popular music certainly doesn't, those 4/4 fruity loops. What is there to learn from that? All those dumb fucking songs. They aren't songs at all.

But maybe the song has potential. Maybe it has some power. But truly any dip shit can take a vocal lesson, learn how to manipulate the air and then track it to a fixed beat. If you were to listen to American music right now, you would think there is no culture. We all just want to masturbate ourselves to death.

How do you make a song really sing? You have to know everything... You have to use everything, to touch any one person, ever.

Kind of like the hover. The hover ends with investments of a universe of tunnels, skyways, passengers, and exchangers. To make the hover, to make it work, you have to understand the whole system and history of where people need to be, where they need to go.

I shut my eyes and this stress and travel go internal. I feel the story underneath,  
burned there, rising, the world not limited by mind or body or eye. Where there is a  
miniature cosmos, waiting.

## Afternoon

We just got off the web with Shasta. I've never met her in person, but she's elusive, even from far away. The new web she bought B and I is fancy, so she was crystal clear in the hover, like she was right there. The individual colors of her rainbow hair bounced and transformed amidst the cloud of her curls. Her extended-tip black French manicured nails tapped arpeggio on the glass. The tink echoed a crisp cymbal out the speakers. Then she asked in a bored tone, "Are you ready for tonight?"

It unnerved me. B had just woken, and they looked like shit— chips caught in long greasy hair.

"We're ready," B said, and threw me a confident nod.

"You should be better than ready." Shasta examined her fantasy nails. "You need to learn how to be yacht riding jewelry snobs. You need to harness impossible confidence." Her all-over glow radiated. I could tell she was plotting ahead, considering dozens of agendas at once. "Like you're partying around the clock, around the world. You're the highs highs and the low lows."

B and I shared the weight of her seriousness and sank into agreement.

She continued. "This tour isn't sold out yet. That means you have to kill these first few. Show them something. Make them look."

I put my arm around B and slid on bedazzled video shades.

“That’s better,” She said and powered off.

## Evening

Inside the venue, the waiting is treacherous. It's always the sound checking stillness I can't stand. It's like there's so much risk but nothing is moving? Bored folks blast funny vids on the wall. There is house music, yes, there is streaming, yes, but whatever's there it comes out wrong.

Woo is still sound checking. I was dying to meet her but now I'm dying to kill her. I always want to kill the other act. Apparently, it doesn't matter who it is. It's an unspoken competition that stews in primate aggression. Like, sure she's good, maybe even great, but I very very clearly just want her to just fall over. Just become tangled in some ropes near the screen and fall over. Smack your head on a sharp corner oh no your heads split open? There's a little bit of blood? A little blood would pair well with her "dominatrix-at-the-mental-institution" thing she's got going on.

I will say, though. In a world where too many play it dumb or safe, she thrives on uncertainty with risk at least attempts to pay. Her performance strips away the excess while maximizing her as spectacle. The result is her standing tall and singular. In her hands, the web is a sound machine, a feral voice, an emotional necessity pumping lifeblood. She's focused onstage, driven by the clockwork choreography of pure mania.

I breathe deep, entering a calm because I know. I know I can do that better.

5/16 Philadelphia, PA - TLA

This morning I woke up hungover in someone else's bed. The last thing I remember is some femme playing an elaborate, antique instrument with ivory tusk keys and glittering chromium buttons. It wasn't a web. It was physical. She stood behind it, holding it delicately, like a lover. Swaying side to side to a drunk beat. She was perfect. I was perfect watching her.

When I awoke, she was beside me, turned over with her bare back to me, messaging on the web. I considered reaching out to her. But.

What's the point?

We packed the hover and left.

"Did ya have fun night last night?" B shot me the smirk of shame.

"Fuck you, B." My head was split dry.

We rode to Philly. I checked headlines for a review of last night's show, and Philly riots were making top news. Eye roll. Growing up, I lived in a bunch of places, but I remember Philly's distinct beer-soaked, bloody, car-flipping for sports.

When I found the review, panic surged through me. I shook B.

"Pull it up." They said.

We projected it in the hover window. The screen voided to a white ball that slowly bloomed:

BAND YOU MUST KEEP ON YOUR RADAR

The screen voided black then red colors flashed:

F.I.F.

The acronym sprinkled and twirled around the hover, like a disco.

Magic and strangeness in full force.

“Web, read aloud.”

“Certainly. Printed today at 5:00 am by World Music News— If you like spectacle, F.I.F. is hard to beat. F.I.F. — which features Cassie Catacombs on vocals and DJ Brandie Vice— are taking the traditional rave staples of eye-popping lasers, brain-frying strobes, mind-blowing lights and cyber projections to new levels. Electro music is no longer dork dude producers with grease-stained attitudes. They are violent, punchy femmes with a had-it-up-to-here punk fury.”

B shook me.

“It’s always rocky news when the opener steals the show. But F.I.F. is not only drug-fueled behemoth of electronic dance music, but could easily become America’s next mainstream darling.”

I sat in the blast of flattery and it seemed completely legitimate.

B and I exchanged breathy fuck yeses.

Shasta called right away.

She looked delicious. Expensive. Black eyes darting thru. Hair bleached white shaved down to the scalp.

“Nice work, femmes. My friend Jamie at Music World seemed convinced.”

I felt a pit in my gut. Vulnerability is when no one else’s opinion matters.

“Tonight.” She paused dramatically. “You’ll need to be better.” Then dramatically powered off.

Natural light seeped back into the hover, and in this switch, vision and feeling synced in focus. Outside, the sheep went all queer on me. I watched them drift unpredictably, moving toward and away from one another, as we zoomed by.

I keep thinking. About tonight. About the future. The future is fame, but the past is here, too. These thoughts blend with the same thoughts I’ve always had. Love poisoned and dreamy, craving the arms of sleep. Then my attention is high jacked by some noise. This time the sound of a horn. Noise is the difficulty always. The fucking excess of it.

I look at B looking out, their arms folded, head against the window, holding the expression of great interest. And everything is so funny. The sheep. B. Shasta. National news. Last night's lover. All my lovers. The hilarity of all of it. The world has no sorrow. It never has. It's nothing but a long sigh. Like a river runs to a sea. A smile on the cusp. We're just stepping through the air.

5/17 New York, NY - Webster Hall

In Philly the crowds were ballistic. Authorities failed to tame them— the honks and butch chests, percussed, story blood pounding. Our hover flew over thousands of undifferentiated bodies. I'd never seen anything like it. Footballer holler from heaven. Rioting glass crash speed increasing. The power of human sound moving deeper into oneness.

Before we entered the venue, we got a web message from Shasta. It read, "Have you ever seen an entire crowd unified in fist pumping prayer?"

Then the strangest thing happened. It was like a psychic vision, only it was really happening.

The first F.I.F. single cast universally— in windshields, ads, the sides of buildings, mirrors, on our own webs. My face, voice, and body, everywhere, all at once. In thrilling vex, heavier than human.

In a series of close, short shots:

Tears, kissy face, panorama femme chest, mushroom cloud creeping up, slowly. B and I exchange of glances, lightening, Jesus is femme. We dive in black water. Underwater, eyes open, white, cold death in the dark. The vast space of unending water and the floaty motion of things, the song ringing in bones, epic waves, and we might call this a love song, if every song is a love song, because we want so desperately to locate affection, the origin story, which promises to help us grasp ourselves.

The crowd outside was catatonic and glued.

In a bassy feeling, deep, affecting.

It was my first time seeing the single. I was curious as anyone else.

By the end I was sure. Our name had been planted, in triumphant sound, with convincing harmony. With volume so high, it's impossible to think of anything else.

And the show sold out, IRL and on the Web.

Entering the venue was surreal. We were immediately recognized. Folks wanted to touch us. They felt like fish, a series of sensory body perils, close and velvety.

After the show, we were summoned to a lavish party. In an aggressively modern mansion, with a high mast and violently sloping roof. It was like a discus emerging obliquely from the earth.

In rare, solitary moments, I sat back and watched.

Panels on the ceiling reflecting light bouncing off the swimming pool. Being there made me feel like cities could float in the sea or houses could vault to the sky. I saw fantastic forms. And the music. Young people dressed stylishly, entering each other's laughter.

There was a femme playing the steel drum. She was focused and lost and beautiful. When she lifted the mallet, she had so much potential, and when she lowered it, moving toward the drum with speed, she had energy. At the moment of contact, the steel soaked the energy and it vibrated. In the steel, air pushed, vibrating molecules, each one cascading, vibrating more molecules. Soon, every molecule in the room was vibrating. Some of them next to my ear; others in my ear canal, vibrating tiny hairs that stimulate nerve cells that send a message.

Her music was becoming mine. Everything in that room was me and mine, and it all was moving outward and outward.

5/18 New York, NY - Webster Hall

I awoke to a video message from Shasta. “Come to my club after the show. I want to discuss business.” She was dressed like a fashion designer at a funeral— neck wrapped by a frayed black scarf, face completely hidden by an oversized hat with peacock feathers bursting.

We’ll finally meet in person, ok. I’m so curious, ok. Who is she up close? What does she want from B and I?

After the show, I went out for some air. I could hear Woo’s set distantly like the way sound passes through water. I breathed deep and arrived at a calm, the sound of grace in my ears, which was interrupted by a small squeak.

She knew where to find me.

It came from a holo. The delicate structure of a femme, hipster and ghostly, cast in cheap holo haze.

“Hello?”

In pathetic falsetto, she yapped. “Shasta is ready to see you.” Her light floated forward. “Follow me.”

I did.

I followed her light through the alleyway, among city voices, and down brick stairs. In front of an unmarked heavy door, her holo disappeared.

This must be the place.

Inside, vague images of Las Vegas clichés reverberated and suspended disbelief. Femmes in cake. Femmes in latex. Femmes garbed in gold. Leading role horror femmes. Witchy femmes. Potion suckers. Confident evil.

Shasta walked toward me with the arrogance of splitting the sea. Her eyes were changing color — aqua / red / purple — emitting a siren effect in the dark. Anyone could sense her dominance. It was like an empty stomach. And that feeling, that distinction, I want it. I want her. It’s what all tycoons seek to catch and sell.

“Cassie, follow me.”

I did. We sat at the glass bar. Colorful, playful pornographic images reeled inside the counter. She ordered “Two pink ladies.”

And I waited.

Predictions about the course of this conversation were choked by house music rising to absurd volume. Through it, as if sent from above, a thick voice cut. My voice. What an odd sensation: hearing yourself in a strange club. It’s almost like watching yourself scream. With guttural soul-cleansing force.

Bind me

tie me

chain me to the wall

Bind me

Tie me

Slave to you all

The music was dizzy with punch and bounce. Onstage a performance was simmering. Some femme in a green tux walked to the tip of the stage. Her arms splayed like a magician's attempt to dazzle. "Heeeeere we go! It's Friday night and you know what that means!"

Under the blue light, at the other end of the stage, a lanky carrot-haired fellow appeared. His skin was latticed in prismatic colors, like a matador suit of lights. I quickly realized he was the subject of an extravagant humiliation. Two fleshy hands cast from above, dangling in his deranged, claustrophobic vision. They were his hands. He moved toward them as if tangled in a net of ropes, toward the desire to attain the lost part of himself so close within reach.

A siren sax roared, and again I heard my own voice skyrocket red through the chorus.

Chain store

Chain-smoke

I consume you all

Chain gang

Chainmail

I don't think at all

I turned to Shasta, and she was mesmerized. Her eyes were singing. Her mouth was listening. She was a perfect horror, all full of rage.

“Shasta! What is this?” I shook her, but she hardly moved. Around us, femme bodies were jerking, side to side, hands in the air.

“Isn’t it lovely! I think male violence is so beautiful.” Her tone was cruelly casual.

Darkness was thickening, creeping up my knees, to my waist, my spine. It all made me sink. I looked to Shasta, and a tiny flicker floated in her eye, both momentary and ages long. It made the dark more menacing, more intense when I peered back into the open room, where now there was almost no light, the dude onstage just a vague shape.

I leaned into Shasta and said, “Let’s get out of here.”

Into my ear, she responded, “Whatever you want.”

What a strange scene to walk away from. I continued to feel radiations of the handless ze at work in me, consuming and degrading my humanity. Thankfully, New York City answers the need for new and urgent stimuli. It’s total commercial sensationalism— the thrills, reflections, and expressions. They announce the upheavals of the world. In crosscutting layers of traffic orchestra, talk, stunts, and slapstick is the guiding principle of attraction.

Shasta braided her arm with mine, and we walked, warm arm to warm arm, to her apartment.

We shot up 50 flights. Inside, her penthouse was lined with transparent glass that opened to the Hudson. Soft city light swam on the asymmetrical bamboo ceiling. I went right to her window, marveling the colors. She came up behind me and gently traced down my back chain.

“I love Esterhazy Platz’s work.”

“Me too.”

“I love her line of sex jewelry.”

“Sex jewelry? What does that mean?”

That made Shasta laugh. “What do you think it means?”

A variety of crass secrets entered my mind: Jewelry you can fuck with. Jewelry only to be worn privately. Jewelry in the mold of human biology. But I didn’t know what to say.

“Here, let me show you.” She led me to her closet, which was fluorescent and mirrored. Behind a safe locked door, was a rainbow spectrum of silver, gold, ruby, sapphire, and moonstone, rings, necklaces, and bracelets. “This is a Choke Chain by Keith Lewis.” She handed me a gold choker. “And this--” Her eyes ballooned, becoming both the store window and the brick— “is a Sparkle Cock by Esterhazy

Platz, same designer as you're wearing." It was a long ringed chain with a bedazzled cock pendant true to size. "Do you want to try it on?"

"If you insist."

"Wear this and people will remember. You should keep it."

"You sure?"

"Of course I am."

"I'll wear it during my next performance." In the mirror, I considered a new version of myself, a person adorned in dick. I became so entranced with my image in the mirror that I didn't realize Shasta had left.

She returned with two Vodka sodas. "I want to talk about F.I.F." She stood behind me to the mirror. In it, I could see shelves of her room lined with a collection of body cast sculptures: fragments of large breasts, rounded stomachs, dimples, and curves, the human form in all its fleshy glory. Cast in bronze. The sculptures have raw, unfinished edges, calling to mind the shattered white marble remains of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture. "The stats coming in are astounding. I've never seen anything like it. People love you, and I want to keep the momentum going. I want to take Future is Femme to the next level."

My gaze shifted back in the mirror, holding the diamond shaft like a microphone.

"What's the next level?" Then pointed it at Shasta.

She held it with the chain still around my neck, and spoke. “As you know the music industry has been run by dudes forever. We hardly ever listen to anything at all that isn’t produced by a ze. Even your album, which was self-produced, was mastered by a stud, right?”

“That’s right.”

She released the cock and sipped her poison. “Let me ask you something, Cassie.” She walked out of the closet and into her bedroom. I followed her, and we sat on her bed. “Your brand is Future is Femme. But have you seriously considered what a femme future would look like?”

The irony of sporting a true-to-size diamond dick was closing in on itself.

“Really. Imagine it. Skyscrapers, busses, planes, reshaped, re-imagined.”

I couldn’t imagine it. I thought about the stupidest things— the web pen, the keyboard, safety railing — and I couldn’t visualize what the femme versions would be.

“F.I.F. can be the beginning of real change.”

My trust was slipping, but I said nothing.

“I’m starting a production company: Auto Tune. And I want to sign F.I.F. I want to give you resources. Not only will you be a musical act, you’ll become an ideal, a set of politics, a corporation, technology, language, maybe even a city.” She was getting

lost, seeing into this future. “These kids, your followers, they need F.I.F. They can’t think for themselves. They want the sourest fictions to come true. They’re nauseated and bored. I want you to be the fiction they crave.” She stroked my face with the outside of her finger. She touched my lips, feeling for something. She looked at me with honest study.

I let her touch me. She said, “Web, turn down the lights” and light escaped. If it weren’t for the glow of city light radiating below, I would have thought myself struck blind.

She kissed me. At first, I was confused and overwhelmed, but we quickly harmonized melodies. Excited laughter that comes before touching. Unzipping and pacing breath. Confessional crying between tongues. A breeze whistling feminine around the penthouse.

We both were wearing elaborate back chains. Hers coiled from her neck down across her open back. I followed the rungs with my hands, my mind and body becoming lost and maze-like, wanting to discover the center of the clasp.

I did.

And it was perfectly formed apple of sin, worm eaten beyond a shadow of doubt.

Way out weather.

After, I'm not sure if I spoke words or spoke in dream language. My mood was held by glittering schemes I could not explain to anyone. This meaning undoubtedly requires climbing over pearly gates.

Which proves not so difficult after all.

5/20 Boston, MA - House of Blues

Things are getting complicated. I woke up this morning in my boss' bed, alone, under a dank comforter. Cutlets of stones pinched in unexpected places. I heard pots clank in the kitchen. Shasta returned with eggs and toast, which she set on the end table. She mounted me, took the small triangle of my jaw lowered herself.

And we ate.

We gorged.

It was coming between us. The music.

I know this will end badly. Someone always gets hurt. She's my boss, so it's likely going to be me. The repercussions. Consider the repercussions.

But fucking sober was an entirely new danger. We made love from noon to three. She choked me, went down on me. Her lips, her saliva, trickling into the hair. She hit me, stroked my clit, my tits. I came five times. She came three times. Brassy screams. Unexplainable energy. A total hangover cure.

All this desire is going to rot my brain. I can't stop thinking about her. Moments from last night bead into each other, one by one neatly, then in reverse, spinning.

Once we got on the road, I had to message her. "When will I see you again?"

She responded right away. "I'll call most days."

God I want her. God I'm doomed. Doomed in all the normal ways.

The hum of neighboring hovers is the hum of the soul. As the landscape moves in the window, I'm entering a sadness. It's a trapped feeling or reverb.

Each city has a particular feeling, a signature melody. Each time I leave a place, I feel this dip in my stomach, the off note, but this time it's worse.

Shasta messaged me again. "I have a photo shoot set up for you in Montreal. The photographer is a good friend of mine. She'll take care of you."

"Take care of me. What is that supposed to mean?"

"You'll see ;)"

5/21 Montreal, QC - Metropolis

It's sunrise, and this early hour does not agree with me. These all-nighters and all-dayers and the chemicals that fuel them are taking a toll. I feel like a sack of dynamite and bones and garbage.

Today's the shoot, and I can't even. I should try to sleep.

The driver from the hoverport considered himself a music aficionado, and he asked me all about my setup.

I didn't have the heart to tell him it's all on the web. B simply presses play. They're the brains of the project— the straight vision, business oriented, serious music producer. The real artistry happens behind closed doors, late and night, caffeine crazed. And me. I just sing and glitz and lose my mind in the lasers.

“Young people are spending a lot of money on you.” He said. “It seems like everyone is putting their money and attention on you, whether they have it or not.”

I didn't have anything to tell him except ya ya ya.

“F.I.F. has spread like a virus.”

That offended me. “Oh fuck off.”

“I'm sorry. That's not what I meant.” His fingers stiffened around the wheel. “You're the party people want. It's more than just the standard treatment.”

“Thank you.”

He continued. “It’s rough watching these youth flocking to bland country and teen stars.”

“Well, there’s no fun in that game once puberty kicks in.”

That made him laugh. “I just don’t know how you did it. You sprung up overnight.”

I could tell he was thinking with rat on the wheel mechanics. Really? You have no idea? No imagination? I kept quiet with these judgments. It’s not that difficult to understand, really. There are huge parking lots and giant stadiums abound that come with ready-made events and culture of people accustomed to filling them. Americans are not the most difficult people to market to. That’s what comes with being the oldest mass consumer society on the planet. And, it’s an unwritten law that for any big participatory event to be successful, it must, like U.S.A., hinge three letters: U.F.C., N.B.A., N.F.L., M.L.B., E.D.M., F.I.F.

He continued, “Driving into the mainstream requires financial viability.”

I agreed.

“Can you tell me about that?”

“No.” And why would I? “But I can tell you this. The ubiquitous four-four beats of house music infected almost every stream of popular music.”

He agreed.

“The problem with the lowest-common-denominator effect is that it often means the music isn’t very good.” It felt like an obvious thing to say, but it seemed to stick. “All those artists who go after placements and fashion lines, their focus is off the music. Never in my life have I made music for money or fame.”

That impressed him. “I think kids need a role model like you.”

“I don’t know about that. I think kids want to get as fucked up as possible.” It surprised me to say it, but it surprised me less than imagining myself some femme’s hero. “Well,” my tone dropped, “the sad thing about show business is that it’s not very inclusive. F.I.F. is simply the party everyone is invited to. That’s our whole mantra. When people try to put rules on that, say some folks can’t come in, the love of music is tragically lost.” I felt my nerves ripping. “We’re in a tradition of electronic music. That history goes something like: dubstep turned brostep turned heavily packaged extravaganza that isn’t about music at all. And our fans, they’re the first generation of Americans that will be poorer than their parents. They’re frustrated. They want true connection but have no way to access it. They’re overworked. The government makes regulations on their bodies. Think of F.I.F. as that forbidden desire surfacing. We’re turning sterile downtown into a tropical carnival. And, we’re taking the express approach.

“What do you mean the express approach?”

“Oh.” In my furry, I realized I wasn’t making much sense. “The express approach is the same as it’s always been. Tequila daze. Pill shock. Body highs.”

“So, it’s about drugs.”

“That’s part of it. It’s all about music that allows people to dance themselves into a transcendental state.” I was growing tired of lecturing. The driver sensed it and shut it.

I closed my eyes and thought about the shoot.

“Where are we even going?”

“They didn’t tell you? We have a long ride ahead. It’s way out in the boon.”

To pass the time, I popped a pill. As the candy sugared me, I couldn’t stand the soft rock he was playing. I craved the beats of F.I.F.

5/22 Toronto, ON - Phoenix

This life doesn't lend itself to routine, but I savor any time I can get to myself. Stuff just pours out. I can sense things simmering. I store so much being out here. There's so much to sing about. I don't even know where to start.

Yesterday was a perfect fury of accumulated dishonesty, about myself and the world, swelling. The shoot with Nasty was dangerously alive — A stream of incomprehensible sceneries, every kind of landscape and tech leaning forward to laugh at me with allure and terror.

It was a big ticket item. Like, higher power accessed.

The driver took me two hours north of the city and dropped me off at a gate, where Peggy greeted me.

We introduced ourselves, and she asked me to follow her.

We climbed a fence. The barbed wire caught tufts of my outfit. We crossed fields and passed an abandoned barn. Peggy paused to appreciate the detail of a wildflower, butterfly, an expansive view. "Isn't this gorgeous?"

It was.

We settled at the top of a field that curved down to a river lining the valley. Cloud shadows chased across the land, water, and sky. Occasional pools of sunlight brightened then faded the weathered slope.

“The others will be here shortly.” She tinkered with her camera; vision focused inward. “How much experience do you have getting your photo taken?”

“People snap me all the time.”

“You mean when you’re performing?”

“Yes.”

“That’s good. I’m going to make you perform.”

She walked around the site, testing the light and her web. I sat on the tranquil cliff, feeling the pill, gazing into eternity. The vault of the sky was gray and transparent. The air was warm. The slightest breeze was stirring. The trees looked painted. Not a single bird flew across the sky.

In the distance, I heard a hum moving steadily closer, the sound of a dark angel.

A large hover flew over the hillside through a pall of mist. It parked at our site and the doors opened up like wings. Six femmes exited— a driver, someone else and four rail thin witchy models. The driver, a rough 32-ounce coffee drinker type, and another, a tall lanky gal, unloaded a machine from the back. I recognized the apparatus right away. Pieces of a colossal modular synthesizer. The driver and helper stacked modules upon modules until it formed a monument. The blunt contrast to the wilderness backdrop made the landscape lunar.

“Do you know anything about these synthesizers?” Peggy asked.

“Yes. Some. I used one in music school. You start with one single element of sound and build around it using patch cables.”

“That’s right.”

The tall skinny femme handed me a dozen primary colored cables. I held them like a bouquet. “You start with an oscillator.” I inserted a red cord. “Then patch it to a filter.” And inserted the other end. “It’s a matrix patching system.”

“Very good.” Peggy’s close proximity to me indicated this was a mutual experiment.

“The great thing about these is it’s not a box someone designs for you. You design the sound yourself.”

“Yes.” She took a small batch of chords from my hands and began constructing patches.

“It takes a few to get to a recognizable sound.”

“Right.” She patched a yellow cord into the sequencer, and strange sound surged in the air. It’s was sound from a long-lost time, matching this machine to our inner machines.

“This is more like a spaceship console than a musical instrument, Peggy said. “It tears the fabric of the universe sound.” She patched the sequencer and we sat in the arpeggio moving up and down the e major scale. We patched new harmonies that

arose mighty, scary energies. Like, I wasn't myself. I was a natural, peyote force bruised by voltage.

“When these were invented,” she said. “We weren't ready to take advantage of such a gift. That's what fascinates me about these. They were too complicated for us. We let them slip away. They ended up in pawn shops and trash bins. We preferred the technologies of comfort and convenience, technologies with presets. Those are the synths that shape popular music— scratch sample bull. But not these. I want to take photos, like this sound, that are not predetermined. Images built from the ground up, in the spirit of invention. Photos taken for the pure pleasure of it. But I can't just do it. I have to steal from you, the landscape, the machine.

Under the influence of hallucinogens and synthesizers, her lips made words madly. Words that are set to run backward. Run in all directions. I continued connecting chords while the femmes posed absurd around me. One face down in the dirt, another with her ass fat out, another between my legs pretending to eat my crotch, and the fourth with her top off and middle finger up. They all switched positions and danced to Peggy's choreography. As I patched.

In the canvas of the obtuse synthesizer, its rainbow patches, and warble notes, I realized there's no such thing as new sound.

There's only one genre worth anyone's time: music that makes your eyes water, heart beat faster and prompts feelings of mild concern. Music that makes you uncomfortable at first and over time gets better, maybe even gets great. Sound that constructs itself relentlessly.

This sound overextends genre toward the indescribable, the felt. The color of sonic language. The metaphor that never resolves. Sound that travels and operates like remembering. Resonance, volume, cadence. How these elements occupy the same metaphysical space at once. Memory is sound. It carries a different voice with every patch, every singer. Sometimes I hear the voice of my mother or an old lover. But there are other voices, too, voices that are not hers, and they murmur at my ear.

I felt the wings of something brush by me, something soft and almost silent. I stood on the cliff carrying so much sound, watching the water crack against itself and cry out below. Broken and healed, groaning, giving off shadowy light. Now I think of all the things lost in that water—jewelry, wedding rings, myself, my mother, my lovers.

Remembering. The speed of it changes with position as energy follows curved paths and becomes refracted. Any type of wave can be refracted. Desert mirages curve as they change in density. A church bell heard from far away. In cold air, people can see and hear things they cannot see or hear in most places, things that have traveled a great distance, thousands of miles, even. A long way back in time.

There is no way to distinguish between the physical and abstract. There is no genre. Sound can never be new. It is hardly here now.

As Peggy shot, I was reminded how much effort is given to holding things in place.

5/23 Chicago, IL - Metro

In Toronto, Woo got fired. During her set, the audience chanted F.I.F. so violently her music was drowned out.

The suits escorted her off stage, and I erupted in a cloud of purple smoke. It's how we released the new single.

It's fucked up, I know. But Shasta said it would generate talk, and I suppose she was right.

As I sang, a kaleidoscope of primary colors sprouted in rows-- light from pocket webs and shining eyes. It was almost like a garden, bulbous luminaries blooming beneath the black dome. Under that umbrella, deep and dark themes cast attention into a numbing lull.

The lyrics in the new song are so simple.

Every / where /

Every / where /

Everywhere

In / your / eyes

As I hum them now I know exactly who the unidentified "you" is. Everyone knows who this "you" is. I am singing to you. You are the only one. You are my everything.

You, you, you.

Later that evening, back in my hotel room, coming down from the rush of performing, I heard a knock on my window, a sound like a concierge bell through the frontal lobe.

Curiosity can be a sickly thing.

Outside the window was her hologram. Shasta summoning me, her index finger curling toward her body, toward the light.

“I need to talk to you.” Her holo walked through the door.

“I’m happy you’re here. I’ve been thinking about what happened to Woo.” Her holo rested on the edge of my bed.

“Cassie, you have to forget all about her. Can you do that?”

“I don’t understand. What happened?”

“The fans don’t want her. They want you. Your vision— your odd, distinctive sound. You’ve captivated the modern world.”

“But it doesn’t make sense.”

“Don’t talk like that.”

“I’m not being insecure. I just don’t understand.”

“Trust me. You don’t need Woo anymore.”

She was convincing, charming. There’s something peculiar about her charm. It’s a transgressive current rambling beneath, a rebellious spirit.

“Cassie, you’re not like these other up and comers out for coin and applause. You’re not doing runway shows. You’re not ranking in endorsements. You’re not running laps around the party circuit.” She paused, her holo leaning closer. “You’re giving fans what they want— a true, passionate companion. Most of these newer acts, the ones who have emerged quickly then disappeared into the web, they aren’t memorable. Do you know why?”

I do.

“The explanation is simple. It’s not what you bring; it’s how you feel. It’s the good universe people want to spend time in.”

I agreed. “It’s all just happening so fast. I’m having trouble believing any of it is real.”

“It’s not your job to believe what’s real. It’s your job to keep doing what you’re doing.”

I’ve heard this cliché before, many times. “Can we talk about something else? Tell me about you. I hardly know anything about you, and I want to know everything! How did you get started?”

She laughed. “You haven’t asked your web?”

I hadn’t, which surprised and embarrassed me. “I want to hear it from you.”

“I’m going to need a drink.” She walked and talked. “Decades ago, the CEO of 6D took a risk hiring me. He was supportive and decent, but I knew as a young, attractive femme, I’d be viewed with skepticism. But that didn’t matter. I had a job to do. And I knew I could do it at 6D.

“6D, huh? Were you there until the end?”

“Let me finish.” She poured herself a drink and sat. “I lobbied hard for the job. I wanted it. I worked with some of the greats, including Jack Anthony, Maverick Jones, and Matthew Martin— enormously important figures in the landscape of 21st century American music. Anthony was a companion of Woo in the early stages of her career, as well as FZA and Logos. Jones was, famously, Mickey Jackson’s closest producer. Jones had cultivated such a powerful persona at 6D he had the nickname “Caption Music.” But that was a long time ago, back when a producer could rule like a superhero. Anyway, I knew no one was going to take me seriously until I won a Gold Music Award. That was quite literally the golden ticket.”

“Punny.”

“Yes.” She was trailing off. “I was so happy then. It fed me— to work with such driven and focused talent. But it didn’t take me long to realize the music world, despite its exterior gloss, was discouragingly conventional. There were a lot of unchecked egos to wrestle with.”

“That doesn’t fly now.”

“No. Now, you have to be everything at once— kind, confident, mysterious. With hindsight, I’m dismayed I lost so much time thinking about rude fucks. That’s the worst part— the lost time. Eventually, I stopped working with dudes altogether. Because I realized the work coming out for femmes wasn’t really for femmes. How could it be? It wasn’t made by femmes. Everything we do for femmes is by femmes. Guys have plenty of producers to work with. At the time, femmes didn’t have any. So, I made it my mission to start a femme label. I produced the early work of Vagina Aquarium, Boo Youth, and Blood Sisters. In my decade at 6D I became close to some of the best artists alive. And I did win a Gold. I won 31.”

“But what about before that?”

She sipped. “My story’s the same as anyone else’s. I love music. I love its animal energy.”

“Ok.” I sensed her boredom. “What about your family. Tell me about them.”

“Oh come on. You don’t want to know about that.”

“I told you! I want to know everything!”

I was plucking intimate notes now. “Ok. Essentially, I’m a mutt. I don’t have this beautiful origin story like a lot of famous people. I grew up in Savannah, my mom’s Indonesian, my dad’s Hungarian. He was born in Queens and adopted by Jews. But I don’t really identify with all that. I identify with the art and music that has

influenced me.” She looked seriously down. “And I want to tell you something. When I was at 6D I noticed a paradox. Every musician I’ve worked with is so good, and every single one of them would have been (and was) fine without me. Of course every artist needs support, especially early in their career, but I quickly learned that a producer’s relationship with a musician has a lot in common with a teacher’s relationship with her students. That is, the smart ones don’t need you, and the dumb ones can’t be helped, anyway. If you want your name to show up in high places, you have write it yourself in a jet stream.”

“I wish you were here, physically here.” I wanted us to continue the elation of personal narrative, to drift to sleep in it. “I have the next couple days off. Can I see you?”

“Yes.”

5/26 Seattle, WA - Showbox

I spent the last two days having sex with Shasta.

Now I'm miserable, on flight Seattle, thinking about her keeping me on edge of coming, breathing great sobbing gasps, whimpering into the pillow.

I think missing someone makes them less human. It makes them into an element, the way she rocks in the waves, trees, material, and matter. All I can do is bite my cheek to try to stop it.

I want to undress her, to feel her legs on my back. She's all I want.

5/27 Vancouver, BC - Vogue Theatre

I'm so exhausted. Last night, Shasta sent me a backstage pass to Kink Night at The Tulip.

The Tulip wasn't far from the venue. I twaddled there, body limp from sex and musical performance, in a magic stupor along lit streets. Downtown was black and silver towers, designer goods in the deserted malls, mute florescent light skidding off the precise curves of matte plastic surfaces. I marched toward the water.

Transformation dub, dirty dub, pulsed from the bars. Some of them were my songs: Psycho, Love Lies, I Fall Apart. I could almost smell the excitement alive in those hot, black dens.

I thought— Shasta, what are you up to? You're going to get me in trouble! Web trolls already swear, "Cassie is a junkie!"

The truth is you have to have your shit pretty together to do any of this, to do anything at all, really. When people are the archetype of the crazy, drunken star, I have no idea how that would be possible, considering all the travel, promotion, performance— all the sheer grueling work. Sure, drugs hit the tables sometimes, but most of the people doing them are the extras with time (and lives) to kill, not the people spearheading the thing.

Tulip was a return to the repressed— leather whips, vampire gloom, ropes, femmes in drag, enchantment, and derangement, bodies rhyming crime with wine.

Paper mache dicks hung from the ceiling. Under them, bodies and figures created an energy that grabbed attention away from humane subject and toward the truth content of art— the truth so hard to understand.

One of my songs was playing.

She stares stately, stupefied

Drone bomb me

Bright

Loud

Check yoself

Dancing the itch

You goin, you goin up up now

I was getting closer to the music, and myself, in pure form. Music without any significations. The phenome of tones, cascading in acoustical kaleidoscope.

In smoky haze on stage, a femme in tight plastic garb was inside a balloon. The balloon was deflating. Her mouth opened. Mean gold fangs. I thought she was going to choke. In the house music, there was a huge explosion that felt like it came from within. Her eyes bulged. The ball shrunk. She stepped out. The entire scene misleading me into erasure.

I stepped outside and suddenly it was dawn. I had been running on amphetamine nerve, all tusks, rank-smelling muscles, sleeveless denim jackets, and sores from bumping against things.

I peered out to the pearl bay. I felt the bowling alley of my brain rolling. My ears clapping. It was a moment of fatal confidence, when you're sitting there thinking, this is it. I am supposed to build something, and I can. When you dial that up, it's like a polite, crisp bell ringing out of empty air. It's like white foam bubbles sudsing over. It's like a gentle, femme voice asking for you.

5/28 Portland, OR - Wonder Ballroom

Today I get to see Shasta.

5/30 San Francisco, CA - Regency

Music and prophecy: I knew the two were linked but couldn't say how.

The Auto Tune entrance was muscular and anxiety inducing. The towering vined metal gate opened to an empty industrial complex. One side of the entrance was lined with a waterfront park and the other a street-food market. Everything moved toward the glass epicenter. Behind that, a series of wood arches connected boxy pods.

At the glass, Shasta greeted me.

“Have a drink.”

She handed me a glass, and I let the liquid snake down my throat. The poison zoomed in on me, and I moved thoughtlessly along the walkway to the roof. Up top, lemon and apple trees fenced the court. The view opened to bridges strung across the virgin blue waters of Spring. We sat in the veranda. Fruit vines clawed up the supports. Shasta and I surrounded by flowers.

“Our vision is to create a destination in the heart of Portland.” She looked off.

“Corporate music offices have always been perceived as closed-off facilities. By wrapping Auto Tune with a range of public functions, we create a project that allows folks to come together and enjoy city life, day and night.”

I couldn't understand why she'd want to interact with the public at all. People these days want ultimate convenient entertainment at home for free. But I didn't get into that. "How did you find this place anyway?"

"It's been on my radar for a while. For years, the site serviced the offshore industry. It was just hunks of junk taking up space. Now, it'll revitalize the city. Auto Tune will become synonymous with Portland. Just look at this." She gestured toward the landscape. "It offers spectacular views of the city and river. It's not a prominent high rise. It's a premier space for galleries, organizations, tech development, arts and music workshops, and events for Portland youth. We're going to host a year-round farmers market. Over there." She pointed at a stainless steel building, with columns vexing 90 degrees out and skyward, crackled and black. "We're renting out one and two bedroom apartments for far less than market value."

The enormity of the space, its various intended meanings, seemed one step ahead of ambition. It felt like I was peering through someone's mind, someone's plan I couldn't quite solve. She seemed oddly calm in the midst of all this, as if she were expecting a bird.

"How is this possible?"

"We've teamed up with the city of Portland." I enjoyed watching the speed of her stare, her focus, endless and objective, which no interval could interrupt. "The developer envisioned a shared live-work space with free access to the city's fastest and clearest web. Inside the exhibition gallery, there will be a cafe and shop. Your merch will be in there, along with other Auto Tune artists. Behind the gallery will be a medium sized auditorium, seating about 300. In the same building, an

education lab, conference room and a kitchen for caterers— all available to the community for rent.”

I was getting a little bored. “Wow, that’s great.”

She continued, “One of the most stunning features is the new mezzanine, over there. The ceiling opens to the Portland skyline. It’s already booked up for several weddings.”

“This place is huge.”

“A 12-acre district.”

“How are you involved in all this exactly?”

She laughed. “I’m the brain. I make everything.”

I leaned in. “Okay, brain, tell me this.” My nose traced her ear. “Why are you so perfect?”

She spoke with her lips brushing mine. “I just want to provide a serum for the banal routines and hurts we all have to endure.”

With my hand gripping the handle of her shoulder bone, I experienced the equilibrium of her nature, fierce and elegant.

“Here’s another secret.” She moved away, lounging back in her seat. “We got a 50-million-dollar gift from the Jones Foundation.” She smirked a thief’s smirk. “So, that helped.” She planted her feet and reclined her head in her hands. “But honestly.” Her shoulders arched. “It’s a team effort. We’re teaming up with the city of Portland, startups, music, foodies, visual artists, outdoor rec, bike fanatics. We all want similar things—community, innovation, entertainment. And music is at the heart. Music ignites our oldest channels. I wanted to create a space that people look at and think, wow. Aspiration is in the air there. It’s in the water, too. And Cassie, for me, all of this comes together in you, in your music. The Future is Femme. The future is open. The future is abundant. The future is connected.”

Her mind was polishing its own beautiful belief.

I was helping her polish it.

I need to stop here. I admit I don't know how to write the next part. This entire thing accumulates to the next part. I know all I have to do is write it. But I'm stuck. I may always be. Stuck trying to write this next part.

After the show, with night in full swing, in the empty, dark surrender of a good night kiss, Shasta said, I want to show you the wet lab.”

These words eat in my chest. The delusion swallows me.

“What is a wet lab?” Was my first question. I asked the web.

“Wet Laboratories are defined as laboratories where chemicals, drugs, or other material or biological matter are tested and analyzed requiring water, direct ventilation, and specialized piped utilities.”

“I still don’t understand.”

“It means there’s blood in the lab.” Shasta said.

“Gross. Why would you take me there?”

“I want you to see this.”

I was along for the ride. We walked through a dome in the back of the foyer, down a corridor with a mezzanine and a triangular arched ceiling. Beneath the ceiling, a chronological series of black and white portraits of music legends lined the hall. This is where the building changes tone, gets darker, colder, emitting shadowy museum light on the starry floor.

Down there, Shasta and I felt really alone. Newly fallen snow evokes a similar sense of isolation. It is a dampening of sound, a muffle.

Entering the lab was jarring, like getting off the subway. In the quick switch from office tones to white lab seriousness, for a moment, everything appeared to be colorless. Clinical coolness lingered on the skin, and the silence of the lab was only interrupted by our steps, which slightly rattled the equipment.

At first, I welcomed the stillness. When Shasta entered the code and the small entrance lifted, I knew this was dangerous. In the next room, a rank, pungent odor assaulted my senses.

Shasta switched on the light, which cast a column onto a body. The general shape of him impressed me, the horror of it. This was a person—a child—caged in a transparent plastic egg. He lay on his side panting, delicate, bent in the arms and legs. Cassie fired another switch and music played—hollow notes boomed rudimentary fuzz. Nasty sounds, pickled in malarial distortion.

It made the boy squirm.

I felt something warm drip down my ears. I struggled to stand inside this sound, penetrating through bone. This sound that sucks hearing itself.

Wild effects enchained the boy, energy emanating from his body, rippling the air and walls.

“Cassie, this is the future of music.”

That’s when I saw it, something that inverts logic.

His eyes bulged. Holes. Holes of light. Shasta confident at the controls, hauling back on the trigger. His mouth opened. A hole. A hole of light. I convulsed with confusion. His eyes bulged further and jumped out of his head to the full length of his optic nerve.

“Shasta.”

“He isn’t in any pain.” She reassured. “You’re conscious the entire way through.”

“Shasta, stop it.”

She hushed me.

Fear pulsed through the floor and walls. The entire room became a horror orchestra. For the first time, the song in my head wasn’t in my head anymore. It was absolute, beyond measure, a big burning death song.

Shasta continued, “It’s just a little snip into your neck. Then you’re no longer alone. You can process billions and billions of bits per second. Really. You never even have to walk again! Though you can, of course.” The boy was dying. “It encodes in an instant.”

Nothing came out of my mouth. I tried to give words through my body, but she wasn’t listening.

Sometimes you meet someone who is pure energy turning human. Such a person's every movement can be reduced to a formative experience; a mirage of scandal, family landscapes, abandonments, blow jobs, the tragic death of a sibling. Such a femme is infected with your longing, going against the wind. Before her, my head and jaw ached. She continues to move toward herself in time, haunting me in sleep. When you meet someone like this, you are one and the same, but separated, like a reflection in water.

I watched the boy's head evaporate into a kind of grayish-red slur. I stumbled backward. He burned slowly, like a firework consuming itself to make light. Then there was no sound at all.

She switched off the light. "We need to get out of here. Right now."

We left the boy dispelled in dark. Our feet rose in the economy of fear, out the way we came and down into a maze of darkness. We immersed ourselves in that darkness, echoing the deserted perspective that stretches between buildings and yards.

The night was chain-link rattling and the smell the river. Grief filtered everything, making objects look bruised and half real.

We went back to my room.

Shasta tried to explain. "That was supposed to work."

"What was supposed to work?"

"The platform. The new music web."

"What are you talking about?"

At this moment, realized I was speaking to the most importantly wicked femme of my time.

Her emotional reactions were without distinction. I couldn't get through to her because there was no way through. "The music business is pumping out more and more content. The downside is that it's hard for any one brand, song, theme, mantra to break through. And Cassie, I want you to break through. I believe in you."

"That had nothing to do with me."

"God." She cupped her forehead. "You're right. But we figured out a way to deliver content directly to viewers! We can bring entertainment right before the eye."

We stood there. Sharing the fear that something was falling apart.

"In LA, at your show, we're rolling out phase one."

It was affronting to discover that. "You're a monster."

Nightmares leaked inside me like warm tar. How much of ourselves should we give to those we love? And how much should we betray to continue moving forward?

I began walking then.

It began to rain with purple night drawing down. I went toward the street because I could see light there, city lamps and checkered lights in high rise windows. I imagined those people up late, as if we were in the same room, in the same dream. Then I saw the boy on the table again, watching him dying. I felt the weight of his body. Then I thought. I thought maybe Shasta has nothing to do with this. Maybe

she's too far deep in something out of her control. Maybe she's out of options. Maybe I am, too.

5/31 Los Angeles, CA - Wiltern

The places I need to be are directed by other voices. The future is. Walking around LA with a notebook. The code shops and tattoo parlors run by one old eyed poets, loaded on bourbon and hallucinogens. The storefront chop joints, their tiny show windows stuffed with animated holo designs and bags of innocent-colored candy, crowded with customers. On the terrace, people in designer clothes saunter confidently toward restaurants, lifting their heads in anticipation of fried food. The sun's setting. Harbor lights on the wine-dark sea.

Voices are rising. Laughter rising above them. Music everywhere, bruising the ear with confrontational baselines. Above this clamor is a sharp, urgent expectation. The future is. I dye while the web reads me a travel blog.

I only wish you could spend five minutes beneath my skin and feel what it's like. Feel the savage swarming passion I feel. But an invitation of this sort achieves nothing, worse than nothing: it comes to them as a threat.

6/1 - LA

This is what happened in LA.

Shasta directed me on stage, and I disappeared in the lasers. Hot gas clouds pumped out in jets and spumes. The gravity of it was apparent, felt at the core.

B released a gigantic beat, and it blasted orchestral confetti.

The cheers were incomprehensible.

Then the crowd's eyes lit in a kind of grey-blue. Large eyes, protruding and clear. Then the eyes went empty. Light escaped. Heads blurred then broke into light.

I can't really remember the next part.

Feedback hissed.

And light rose in a bluish dawn. Lights like foam and diamonds. Lights like pearly water.

From the stage I watched everything creak. Everyone turning to find themselves. Spines sprung. No boundaries, skin, bones, lips, or words-- just a feeling, a falling feeling.

Time does not stand still. Music tries keep things in place. Technology, too. It curses us into whatever now counts for being.

This was when I became a true performer. I became all the parts in place. I knew them. I knew them all, innately.

Everything I've ever wanted.

Is closer to the music.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adorno, Theodor W., and Richard D. Gillespie. Leppert. *Essays on Music: Theodor W. Adorno ; Selected, with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Richard Leppert; New Translations by Susan H. Gillespie*. Univ. of California Press, 2009.

Adorno's essays offer insight into how music and culture form a discursive relationship. Adorno was considering a very different set of politics than F.I.F.. He adhered to Marxist values. However, his writings remain current (in some ways) because music remains an enigmatic, anomaly topic to approach and navigate in literature. The subject in music is personal and alienating; and therefore, attempts to locate it are problematic at best. The object of study of music in literature isn't about music at all, but one's ability to symbolize the temporal moment with others that seem distant, submerged or lost—the ability to connect with a metaphor that brings into question perception of presence and time. My challenge when writing F.I.F. was in considering where Adorno's ideas fall short in this futuristic landscape.

Barnes, Djuna. *Nightwood*. Faber & Faber, 2015.

Barnes offers this beautifully lyrical novel all about desire. I was inspired by her use of dialogue, how it's almost Socratic, reveling abundant information and characterization.

Barry, Kevin. *Beatlebone: a Novel*. Anchor Books, A Division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2016.

The short, web-like content paragraphs in F.I.F. are inspired by Kevin Barry.

Bennett, Claire-Louise. *Pond*. Riverhead Books, 2017.

The concise confessional nature of F.I.F. is inspired by Claire-Louise Bennett.

Bolaño, Roberto. *The Savage Detectives*. Picador, 2008.

The form of F.I.F., which is diary - reviews - testament, is adopted directly from Bolano's *The Savage Detectives*.

Harrison, M. John. *Light*. Gollancz, 2007.

The thematic goals of F.I.F. are similar to John Harrison's *Light*. However, instead of light, the content in F.I.F. is music and identity, not light and murder.

Kavan, Anna. *Julia and the Bazooka*. Peter Owen, 2009.

The inspiration for Shasta comes from Julia in Anna Kavan's *Julia and the Bazooka*. I love Julia's remove, her dazed and observational nature. She's hard and rough. She's also a sick and evil, but we love her for it.

Singer, Ben. *Melodrama And Modernity*. Columbia University Press, 2001.

This text explores the melodrama genre in early modern cinema. The anchoring idea is that at turn of the 20th century audiences were attracted to

the shocks and twists of melodrama. Singer's conclusion is that these attractions correspond to the infrastructure and technology of the modern era. In other words, landscape influences personal desire. For the F.I.F. world, I had to consider how new technologies influenced behavior.

Yuknavitch, Lidia. *The Book of Joan*. Canongate Books Ltd, 2018.

This is book is wild. I love it. I love how she mixes spectacle with sentimentality, how elaborate, confessional and fearless it is.