



No, you listen here, ya' big dummy!

PINK OLIVE

BY K.LEIGH

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K. LEIGH

K. *LEIGH*

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K. *L E I G H*

DEDICATION

To my husband: You're my hero. Your love and patience was what I truly needed to heal. Thank you for the much-needed grace you've given me on this journey. I love you unconditionally.

To my best friend: You're also my hero. I wish you'd finally get that through your thick skull, but in any case, thank you from the bottom of my heart. I love you.

To my long-term readers: Thanks for coming along for the ride. I hope me facing my demons in art inspires you to do the same and helps you avoid my mistakes. If you've read everything so far, I know you have it in you. Good luck.

To the good people I hurt in the past: I will forever be sorry. I do not expect forgiveness, and do not anticipate you'll understand this book or my experiences. However, I must explain what actually happened, for my peace of mind.

Finally, for those who hurt me: I know this book will paint an unflattering picture of you. Some of you are good people, and I'm sorry if this hurts. Some of you are horrible people, in which case, I hope it stings like a son of a bitch.

One more thing: If this book doesn't make sense, read the others, come back to *PINK OLIVE*, and sit with everything. It should click if you're patient, but if not, it might not be your type of story. That's okay. I will soon write linear novels to enjoy, but this project could never be straightforward.

Good luck and stay tuned. Now that I've untangled the mess of me, I have infinite stories to write. I hope you love them. More than that, I hope they teach you essential life lessons that took me forever to learn.

CONTENT WARNING

The following story contains depictions of mental illness, abuse, violence, eating disorders, drug use, psychosis, panic attacks, autistic meltdowns, depression, rape, dissociation, suicidality and more.

There are also explicit consensual sex scenes depicted.

Moreover, it includes marginalized groups such as autistics, LGBT+ characters and abuse survivors struggling to move beyond their trauma.

I ask that you read with empathy, as this book aims to tell my very real story and strip the artsy metaphors once and for all. I'm reclaiming my voice.

If you're brave, please proceed. If not, that's okay and I don't blame you. I ran away from it for a decade, too. But if you're like me, it just might help you feel less alone.

In any case, I appreciate your time and hope the art speaks to you. Good luck.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kira Leigh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

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PART ONE: THE PAST

“You do have a story inside you; it lies articulate and waiting to be written — behind your silence and your suffering.”

— Anne Rice



1 / BRAN-NEW LOVE SONG

Sitting on a sandy white beach watching the world end feels like being stuck in a TV show that got canceled after just one season. Twenty-six years on this soggy rock, and I get thrown into an apocalyptic thriller followed by a wet fart of a finale. Everyone dies. My friends, the cat, the planet—even reality all fall into a starry void. The only survivors are this beach on the Cape, the little blue butterfly putzing above my head, my fuzzy pink noggin, and my probably psychopathic partner in crime.

I glance up. The clouds above shimmer like when the TV fritzes. Aww, man, there goes the butterfly. Static pulled him into a black hole. He never really had a chance—poor little guy.

The water beyond tugs at me. I glance at the shimmery waves. Soon enough, they vanish just like the butterfly did. Little by little, space-time swallows everything up. Well, everything except for me and the weirdo holding my hand.

Superhero Olivia Lawrence is a time-bending short-stack with a bad accent and worse manners. Alex Voss is an unkillable supervillain with a death wish. Together, they're destined to save the world from a time apocalypse. But despite all their best efforts, it won't play out like that.

We fail. Scratch that. I failed.

The crayon-yellow sun above dims like someone closed their fist on it. The red light's still kicking, I guess. If it wasn't, I couldn't see the face of the guy I prolly gotta doom to fix this. His death wish ain't gonna become a death reality if I have anything to say about it,

though.

I wrap my arms around Al's shoulders.

Red light drowns out all the other colors.

I starfish on top of his body with my legs around his waist, slowly push him to the sand and hold him there.

"Livvie." Alex struggles beneath me. "Liv." He shouts, "Olivia!" and flips us to pin me down. He asks, "You tried everything else, yes?" and stares into my burning eyes. "You are not the problem. So."

He lets his death sentence just hang there like a big stupid idiot.

"I won't!" Shouting won't do me any good. I know how it ends.

My blurry eyes trail to the sky. It looks like it's melting. Blue sky folds around Al's back like a plastic shower curtain wafting over steam.

He runs his thumbs over my cheeks. "Don't you wish to fix this?"

When I don't say a word, he sits back to pin me down with his eyeballs instead. His face looks even sharper under the red light of a busted sun.

Alex mutters, "All those we know," and scoops up the world's last seashell. "I can't die unless I agree to do so."

The conch in his hands is pretty, but his words sure as hell ain't.

"But I don't think this is death. Maybe, it is like fixing mistake."

My face turns pinker than my hair.

"Livvie." He grazes my knee with his fingertips. "I thought you loved superheroes. You know, your comic book bullshit."

Turning so I don't have to feel his evil eyes on me, sand sticks to my damp cheeks. "You're..." I sniffle. "Y-you're asking me to get rid of ya."

A starry lake swirls with blues and pinks just a few inches from my shoulder. It'd be pretty if it wasn't tryna gobble me up.

It hasn't yet because Mr. Unkillable is here.

"We dunno why the heck this happened! And you want me to pop around again, fer what?" My nose leaks snot. "To shove ya off a cliff? Break yer damn neck?!" I snap, "Eat my ass, buddy!" as my face grows even hotter than it already was. "You dunno what the heck you're askin' me to do."

There ain't enough room to roll away from him. There ain't enough room to do anything at all. There ain't nothing left.

"I am asking you to be the hero, Livvie," he insists. "I was wrong."

"What the heck does that mean?!" I snarl, twisting to glare at him, but my anger don't last. I can't be mad at him for long, even when he definitely probably maybe deserves it.

Al pulls a pack of cigarettes and a pink lighter from his blue swim shorts pocket. "Remember that night?" he begins, lighting up

one of the last cigarettes ever made.

The tobacco stench wafts in my nostrils. I hate it, but I'm not gonna make a stink about it. Creature comforts are all we got now. It sucks I didn't bring my cassette player. Tunes would make this a lot less crappy.

"Something changed, Livvie. All this." He gestures at the void swirling around us and says, "I do not think I'm meant to be here anymore."

"But..." I rub a palm into my stinging eyes. "But it..."

"Made you happy?" Al smiles. "Me too, Livvie. But I do not know if I get to be happy." He flicks ash on the sands of time like none of this sucks. It's just another day in our goddamn life. A normal day where he smokes, says crap, and I stare into space as my face boils hotter than the sun.

I jerk upright. "What about me, huh?" Without thinking, I smash my skull against his forehead. "Don't I get to be happy?"

I'm hot-pink, stubborn, loud, and dead honest. I will never give up, like an unstoppable force powered by my damn thick head.

"Don't I get a say in any of this crap?!"

He smiles at me, but it looks like a frown.

Al's a cold blue dumbass, welcoming the end like he's already given up. He used to be a bitchy immovable object. Nothing ever dragged him down, but this whole end-of-the-world thing seems to have gotten to him.

Al says, "Maybe you would be," and leans away from me. "Maybe you would patch things up with Percy, hmm?" He searches my eyes for something I can't know. "Don't you wish to live, princess?"

Jerk! I'm gonna fix this, and you ain't dyin' on my watch. You can't change my damn mind, either. Dummy.

"Eat the ice cream, see movies, have fun? Laugh with friends, perhaps. Spend time at Lauren's. Her garden was beautiful, you know," he says, gesturing with his cigarette. "I loved her flowers too."

This sucks.

As the last hunk of reality fades, sounds get muddy. I can't even hear myself breathe over the pressure of nothing. It's even heavier than the time my dad screamed at my mom so bad that everything went quiet.

I mouth, "I wanna go home," as my eyes flutter closed.

2 / NOT REALLY LITTLE

“Can’t we just...” He ain’t sittin’ in front of me no more. What the heck? Blinking rapidly, I ask, “Where’d ya go?” I try to focus, but everything looks like it was scribbled over with watery markers.

My neck is itchy. Moving to scratch it, I find a chunky blue crayon in my fist. It’s waxy and smells like grease. Dumbfounded, my eyes travel from the crayon to the wooden table cutting off my circulation.

We had tables just like this in third grade. Cheap and always sticky; the only good thing about ‘em was you could peel the laminated corners when class got boring. Which was always.

Wait.

Bolting upright, I drop the crayon and stumble back. The orange chair I was sitting in clatters to the floor, making a murder of kids gawk at me.

Looking down, I see ugly floral carpet fabric floating around my knees instead of torn-up jeans. The floor below is beige, flecked, and stickier than the wood table. My shoes are black, shiny and comically small. I’m wearing off-white stockings on my legs.

“Oh, crap.”

My third-grade teacher strolls to my side, grips her hips, and frowns at me until her face looks like a paper bag stuffed with an oily sandwich.

If I’m where I think I’m at, I was a problem child in this class. Mostly, I was bad at math and wandered away a lot. Mrs. O’Neil didn’t know what to do with a kid who was too afraid to ask her parents for help with math. She also didn’t know what to do with a kid who walked out when she felt ostracized. I walked out a lot up until high school.

"Now, now, young lady," she starts up in a raspy voice, and because I know she's gonna yell at me, I make a break for it.

She rips at my arm pretty rough for how small I am and how small she ain't. When I was really little, I would've reacted like any other traumatized eight-year-old: warm guppy tears sliding down my face. Then, I'd go back to my seat, all to grind my fists into my eyes and cry more.

But because I'm not actually a traumatized kid, I mash Mrs. O'Neil's foot and bolt. If I was really little, I woulda' looked back to see her fall on the carpet and feel wicked guilty. I'd apologize, cry harder, spot the faces of my classmates, think I was the worst kid ever and cry more.

But I don't look back. Instead, I run.

I ain't supposed to be here right now. I'm supposed to be at the end of the world with Al, trying to figure out how we stop the apocalypse without him dying. My time blinking is never random like this. Never.

I run with all my might, but my stubby little legs are useless. Worst of all, my shiny, wicked small shoes make a racket. If anybody was tryna catch me, they could hear me coming from a mile off, and football tackle me to the floor, no problem.

Whirling around a corner, I swipe the rainbow painted on the walls, then barrel toward the school nurse's office. I spent more time with the school nurse than I did in class. She let me hang out when I was overwhelmed. Which was way more often than it should've been, but nobody ever asked me what was going on. They just thought I was weird.

The school nurse calls after me, but I don't stop. I won't stop for anybody, not even the damn principal. Not until I'm outside, past the playground, and collapsing into the dirt, do I peer over my tiny shoulder back at the elementary school that let me down.

Shaking, I reach up to find a twig in my hair. Prying it from my banana curls, it's only now that I realize what day this is.

"Crap!"

Scrambling, I wipe dirt off my stockings and get my bearings. There's some moss, rocks I know, and my favorite tree. I squeak, "Okey dokey," and lock on a fuzzy point: a home that was never really mine.

Squaring up my pint-sized shoulders, I trudge through the park. I don't have money for the adult bus, but I can make it in time if I cut through.

After twenty minutes of swatting leaves and pushing through mud, my hyperactive kid stomach roars.

Superhero Olivia has lost control of her superpowers. Flying backward in time, she is now stuck in the body of a starving elementary school student for no goddamn reason.

I roar right back at it and stomp the ground like any other frustrated kid would. But I'm not a kid. I'm twenty-six goddamn years—I blink. My reflection greets me. How'd I end up back at home starin' at the glass slider? I squint. There's Mom in the kitchen, beating steak with a rolling pin.

"Aw, crap," I grumble.

"You stupid fucking cunt!" This is my Dad, shaking the house with a scream. All sounds grow muffled. Everything freezes, including me.

I forgot how loud he always was.

The first time I lived through this, I ran to my room and daydreamed about superheroes until I fell asleep. The sound of sirens woke me up. Red and blue lights lit the porch. I didn't know what was happening when I was little, but I do now.

Cupping my hands, I peer past my reflection.

Mom stops beating the steak. She looks down at the hunk of wood in her fist like she wants to throw it at Dad's head. I always wished she would.

I shout, "Mom!" rip open the door, and tumble inside.

Mom should be surprised to see me home so early, but she ain't. She just smiles. Mom has a round face, light brown hair, bad knees, strong cheekbones, and clear hazel eyes like me. Except today, her eyes are foggy.

I forgot how drunk she always was.

I turn, close the sliding door, place my hand on the glass, and take a breath like I've got the weight of the world on my shoulders.

As a time lord in the body of a grubby third grader, I got a decision to make: I can relive this knowing I'll have to clean up the mess, and it'll change me forever, or I can try and fix it.

If I let this play out like it's meant to, Mom will sink into an alcoholic depression, I'll become her rock at the tender age of eight, grow into a doormat, unlearn what 'no' means, and end up mopping up their feelings like a full-time job. Their garbage teaches me that folks only love me when I clean up their emotional, physical or shituational messes.

Because that sucks, I'll try to steal back the childhood I never got. I'll start talking like a brat, daydream my life away while listening to music, and obsess about stuff like comic books just to escape.

When that's not enough, I'll take to riding my bike. I'll bike around the entire city for hours. I'll bike until way past dinner because my parents aren't the only thing I ran from. It's the trash.

The basement is an unfinished mess: a combination of clothes, knick-knacks, and toys railroad against Dad's business stuff. Piles and piles of paper, a treadmill, trash bags, toys, folders, receipts, and a conch from a beach trip make up the rest. The papers grew as our debt did. Dad files for bankruptcy eventually; he said work dried up, but the truth is that he just stopped working altogether.

Eventually, my parents get divorced after way too long, and even though I hate lying, I'll make up a lie about home to anyone who wants to hear it. For years, I'll say I was homeless, and they were sick. It's not a big lie. In fact, if you squint a bit, it's pretty goddamn true.

I glance at Mom as she makes a tasty meal while buzzed on something.

Flicking my eyes to the back of my Dad's head, he's doing what he always does: watching television. That is until Mom makes too much noise, and he's back to swearing while his face gets oily and red like pepperoni.

My life would be way better if I fixed this mess, but that's not the right thing to do. Time powers are super powerful, for sure. But using them for selfish reasons is what supervillains do and I might start a world war if I mess with it too much. Time butter's got consequences.

Dad, finally noticing me, cocks a brow at my muddy shoes and swears at me in Japanese. When I was little, I didn't know what it meant. Now that I'm older, I know he just called me what he called Mom.

Sometimes, I think he had me so he'd have someone small to bully.

For some reason, I totter into the kitchen. Feet moving on autopilot, I sneak around Mom as she drinks from a teacup. My hands reach up and slide the rolling pin off the plastic countertop all by themselves.

Back in the living room, I stare at the back of Dad's sweaty neck. "Dad?" I hear myself say.

He turns to look at me with nothing but toxic disdain, and it's then that I smack him with the rolling pin.

The sound of the wood cylinder beating my Dad's skull snaps Mom from her glassy-eyed stupor. She peers at us over the wood divider, slowed by the booze she huffed. That gives me time to hit him again, which I do.

I don't like when people get hurt, but here I go, doing it to stop

a bad guy from nearly killing somebody I love. Guess Al rubbed off on me more than I thought. The problem? I'm not unkillable like Al is, Dad ain't going down without a fight, and he doesn't care if he hurts me.

Sweat drips off his bloody face. In a flash, he rips at my curls.

I drop the rolling pin and scream bloody murder.

A crash comes from the kitchen.

Mom lurches into the living room. "You. Don't you ever lay a hand on my daughter!" She slaps Dad across the face with a deafening thwack that could crack time in half if I let it. Which I wanna, but I can't.

Time stuff is too complicated, and I don't wanna clean up that mess on top of saving the goddamn world.

Taking a step back, my slick shoe scrapes off the rolling pin.

Mom reaches out her hand to me just as Dad rushes her.

Slipping makes me close my eyes to brace for impact.

3 / BUTTER

The thing about messing with time is that it can lead to the butter effect. Drop a chunk of yellow grease on the ground, step on it, slip, and you can accidentally start a war, ya know.

Say you jostle a waiter in a restaurant, and they spill soup on some girl's shirt. What if she's got a big meeting with a hotshot later? Well, if she's got a gnarly soup shirt, she might not hit a big sale.

This makes her boss wicked pissed, but he's tryna be cool, so he only gets mad once he's in his car. Drivin' angry means he cuts some other guy off in traffic, though.

This next guy misses his exit, so he rushes like a dummy and accidentally hits a pedestrian. And that guy—the guy bodied by a car—is an incognito foreign diplomat.

Suddenly, you got an international incident on your hands, all because some girl got soup on her shirt, and her boss needs to go to therapy.

If Dad doesn't almost kill Mom, I might start World War III. That sounds bonkers, but using time powers willy-nilly does have consequences.

I have the fuzzy spots in my memory to prove it.

I say, "Rad," and let out a sigh. Then, I blink to the start of this crappy day and spend most of it drawing on my math sheets in blue crayon.

The afternoon rolls on by. I escape into comic books to avoid watching a fight that almost got Mom killed. The police show up, but they don't hold Dad for long, which doesn't make sense to me.

Aren't the cops supposed to protect people?

After this nightmare plays out, I go to sleep in my childhood bed.

It's a dreamless sleep on the edge of anxiety where you're too freaked out to be comfortable, but too exhausted not to fall into short naps. A snore wakes me up. My eyes flutter open. Everything is dark and I'm nestled under mounds of warm cloud-patterned sheets.

I smile, because my time blink worked just right. "Good," I whisper.

Al's nose is pressed against mine as he sleeps, breathing soft and safe.

Al used to have nightmares about stuff he won't talk about, but he doesn't when he sleeps next to me.

I used to have a hyperspeed heart and stay up for hours just staring at the ceiling, terrified of nothing at all, but I don't when I'm with him.

I mumble, "Hey," and nudge his nose.

Alex cracks an eye open, makes a face, and then cloaks me with his arm. He brings my head below his chin. "Mm. What time is it?"

"I dunno." My fingers trace the tattoos on his back. "What's the date?"

He says, "Ah. You did the blinking," and pulls away to look at me. "What was it this time?" he asks, sleepily curling his leg over my hip. After a moment, he adds, "August. Ninety-eight."

"Mom and Dad stuff. I didn't mean to. It just kinda happened."

Al's got this way of staring at people. It's unnerving, but you get used to it when you figure out he's tryna make a map of your face.

"I thought you said before. What was it?" Alex closes his eyes. "You always know where it is you are going. Not this time. Yes?"

I shake my head. "Somethin' happens later. Might've messed with it too much. 'Member, we talked about the world. Uh..."

Sometimes, time butter slides off Alex funny. He remembers changes and events, but not always. It's like he's in a bubble. Al also always believes me when I talk about my time powers. I dunno why, because it sounds completely bonkers, even to me.

I scan his sharp eyes for a sign that time butter didn't stick. He's got a pretty/scary face, kinda like a nice snake. Only if you're nice, too, though. Otherwise, he's downright McNasty, toxic and loud about it.

"I'm tryna fix it, but I dunno."

He sighs, gives me a look that's hard to read, grabs my hand, and stumbles off the bed to drag me through the covers.

My long, comfy socks make muffled noises on the hardwood. New York is cold in the fall. The beach we flee to when the sky spits buildings is much colder. About a year and some change from now, we run instead of fight.

It's kinda impossible when it gets that bad, anyways. The birds fall before all that, like a warning. We never notice until it's too late, even though I know it's gonna happen. It's like there's no other path in time except destruction. But that doesn't really make sense, does it?

Our cat Diana lies on the floor, basking in the glow. She curls into a white circle as we pass. We step around her in unison. The sound of rain in the gutters pitter-patters as Al pulls me into the yellow kitchen.

Al breaks away to rummage through the cabinets. Squatting, he pulls out a pot and places it on the counter. "Cocoa," he says in a goofy accent.

The calendar above the trash can catches my eye.
"Goddamnit."

Superhero Olivia, hoping to time travel to a comforting memory to get her bearings, has blinked to the month she and supervillain Alex temporarily break up. A stupid mistake that almost cost her everything she loves rises up to greet her.

It was a wicked stupid mistake. Scratch that. It was my stupid mistake.

Alex slaps a container of Ovaltine on the counter. "Princess?" he asks, then dumps a carton of milk into the pot.

As the milk heats up, he stirs it with a wooden spoon.

"It's nothin." I scrunch my shoulders because I don't like lying, least of all to him. "You happy I taughtcha cookin'?" I ask, rounding to watch him make me 'special' cocoa.

Al flashes a lopsided grin. "Yes. I do not burn the milk anymore. Mostly." He chuckles. "Eh, hand me the Oval thing," he says while gesturing.

Swiping the chocolate powder, I twist the cap off, stick my tongue out, and prepare to dump some into the bubbling pot of milk.

"No." Alex pokes me in the tit. "Needs more time for the 'special' cocoa."

Setting the Ovaltine down on the counter, I say, "We're gonna break up fer a bit. This month."

Sometimes, I say stuff that makes people upset.

"Eh?" He cocks a brow at me.

Making a face, I twist the knob to turn the burner down to low heat.

"No, we do not break up." Alex wags his spoon at me. "Why would we?"

There's a ton of reasons, Al. Many that make me sound mean as heck. Others that are pretty damn true. Some that are both, which sucks.

Finally, there's the stuff I make up when I think too much.

I raise the Ovaltine above the pot and say, "Now, or it's gonna burn."

He wags the spoon like he wants to argue. "Okay. You are the boss."

The thing about Al is that he respects what I wanna do before anything else. Even if it's wicked stupid, or I'm wrong, he always caves in the end.

I pour the powder into the milk little by little.

He stirs all the while, then scoots closer so our shoulders touch.

Alex twists the knob to turn down the heat, then licks the spoon.

"Perfect." He beats the spoon on the pot rim, which makes my ears ring. "Now, it is time for the mugs. Can you get them for us?"

"Yeah. Yes."

Turning, I float to the cabinets and scrape around for our special mugs. First comes a violet-blue mug that's too loud to look at for long. I take it in my hands, twist and pass it to Al. Next, a pink one that's not as loud, but it glows in the dark if you let it sit in the sun first.

Back to the treat, Al pours the cocoa into our mugs with the seriousness of a damn brain surgeon. That's how I do it, too. He learned it from me.

"What do you mean 'we break up?'" he whispers. "I do not want to."

Rolling my lower lip into my mouth, I try framing it in my head first. But there's no way to say this without making us both sad. This sucks.

I say, "We're gonna have some fun, ya know?" and chew my lip. "Then I'm gonna ask if you miss doin' it with guys." A stupid question nobody should be asking their person, but sometimes I say the wrong thing.

Alex freezes mid-pour.

I'm not mad. I know I'm Al's exception, and he's mine. I get angry about the breakup when it happens, but I caused it. I messed this up.

Setting the pot aside, Al places his hand on his hip, snatches his mug off the table, and guzzles it like it's not full of boiling hot chocolate.

He did this the last time, too. Made me cocoa 'cause I was upset, I asked that stupid question, stuff happened, and then he got sick

again.

“So yer not gonna say nothin’?”

Alex lingers on his sweet drink for a century.

With a sigh, he finally blurts out, “Sure. I said I’d never lie to you. So, I cannot.” He scrunches his shoulders. “But I love you,” he says. “It is simple to me.” He flicks me on the forehead. “End of discussion.” With a raised hand, he adds, “Please.”

I got a bad habit of asking questions that don’t help.

“Do you wanna know what happened?”

Matter of fact, I say things constantly that make everything worse. I dunno why, neither. It must be one of life’s great mysteries. Right up there with Why Do I Have Time Powers, How Is He Unkillable—and the most important one—How The Heck Do I Save The Goddamn World?

Al shakes his head. “No. Yes? I don’t know, Livvie,” he sputters. “If you already know we do this, can we skip it? Maybe we do not do it.”

“You get back with Mark fer a little bit.” Why the heck am I telling him this? “He lets it slip after too much booze. You dunno what to do about me knowing. Get wicked depressed. I do the silent treatment ‘cause I’m mad for no reason. It sucked.”

I didn’t wanna say any of that.

It just happened.

“No. We do not do that,” he hisses. “Just because I like being railed in the fucking ass doesn’t mean it must be men. And fucking Markov?” He’s wicked pissed. “Don’t be fucking stupid.”

I wince.

He sighs. “Sorry. I do not mean to swear.” Then, he gets mad again. “You wake me up with time bullshit.” His mouth twists. “Now this. Enough.”

He snatches his drink, sweeps past me, and glides out of the kitchen.

Sighing, I scoop my cocoa off the counter and trudge through the living room. The cat shadows me. I enter the bedroom and hop on the bed.

“Hey,” I say, pulling at the elastic of Al’s boxers.

“No. You don’t get to play this fucking game with me, Liv.” He sneers. “Time bullshit. Fucking with time. You tell me how I am. I don’t have choices. You can do anything. Instead, you fuck with it.” He’s more than wicked pissed. He thinks I’m being mean on purpose, which I ain’t. “Why don’t we leave?” he scoffs at me.

Man, there ain’t nowhere to go from here. All I’m doin’ is troubleshooting a time mess, but reverse-style. The world ends, dude.

Done. Finito. Game over.

He grumbles, "Why don't we win lottery? What is the point," then snatches my mug from my hands. "You focus on negatives." He takes a gulp. "I'm trying not to. I did that."

Wiping his mouth, he adds, "So, why?"

When he's right, he's right. We could do anything. Here I am, try-na save the world, but all I did was say things that make us both sad.

Lemme try and fix it. "We don't break up ferever, silly."

He hisses, "That's not the fucking point, Liv!" and shoves the mug into my hands. Crossing his arms, he glares at me for way too long.

The cat starts making bread on my leg.

"What are you looking for?" he snarls.

I squint. "Huh?"

"What do you want for your life?" He clarifies nada bathed in moonlight, while I sit in darkness, sip my drink, and stare at the cat.

"Man, I gotta find the time butter."

I time blink away. He doesn't get it. Even when I explain it all, he doesn't care. It's like the world ending isn't real for him. It's like nothing is real for him, except for me.

4 / *IT ALL FALLS APART*

Being a superhero would be easier if there was a goddamn instruction manual, but comic books only got me so far. The rest is good old-fashioned experience. I got plenty; I always knew I was wicked different.

As a kid, I'd blink through time by accident. I'd even have these wild dreams about the future, too. Dreams that weren't just dreams.

Once, I dreamed about a planet made of metal out in the stars. The planet was near a bright yellow galaxy. People who ran the planet sucked. All my friends were there, but we were robots. We had superpowers then, too.

Lauren was an artsy statue called Vox, until she was a body-hopper with a mean right hook that could punch a hole through a foot of metal.

The bad guy had Mark's face. He was a creepy, bougie weirdo.

Mark was short and could set off a fire alarm with his hands.

Moira was called Diana; it was like she got scrambled with our cat. Her power was talking people into doing stuff. Sorta like a mind-flayer, but she was still wicked nice, like always.

Eric was named Henry and was the same goofy guy. He might've been taller, now that I think about it. I don't remember what his powers were.

Percy was Polly; sadder, ditzier, and more into fancy crap than ever before. I don't remember what she could do, neither.

Al was named like he was a computer part. The metal planet used him as a battery. His power was being too angry to die, which ain't all that different from how it is here on Earth.

In the futuristic dream, my name was Maya. I looked the same,

built machines to help folks, and my power was messing with space-time.

The whole dream was like a sci-fi show with twists, turns, and a time-bending plot. We fought baddies and saved the world. At the end, it even had a song that came from our world, like a soundtrack.

It also had super-folks I didn't know, at the time. Eventually, I'd meet every hero I dreamed about. They're my friends. The weird thing is that we always meet up regardless of how much I mess with time. Not only that, but the future dream is always the same. It never changes, which bugs me, because that don't make a lick of sense.

If everything on Earth goes to crap no matter what goes down, how do we even make it to space to begin with? It becomes hell down here. Everything falls apart, lots of good people get hurt, and there's even cannibalism.

Cracking an eye open, I see I'm in the future, but not as far as the metal planet from my dreams. That future-stuff only happens when I'm dreaming. I never make it past the beach with a time blink.

Red-orange sands burn my feet. The sky is violet with a neon sun.

I'm walking through a wasteland, and I don't know what to make of it. I don't have the vocabulary for destruction. Books, televisions, dead bodies, and cars are all over the place. Our apartment is mostly intact, sitting in the desert like a battered oasis.

Weathering nuclear heat, superhero Olivia finally reaches her apartment amidst a sea of sand. A dumpling shop sits below as a reminder of the life she used to live. Yuen's death weighing heavy on her mind, she approaches the front door and glances at her destroyed home.

Touching the brick wall outside our place makes it crumble beneath my fingertips. I step over the busted door and walk through the foyer. Glancing up, I see chunks of sky bleeding through the cracked roof. To my left is a hole in the wall. To my right is a memorial to our cat.

"Al?" I call out, but it's me who finds me.

This is one of the rare times where I didn't blink into my body. Hasn't happened very often. Maybe it's 'cause she's so different from me.

A me with longer hair grips her hips and sizes me up. The last few months she's been through held horrors comic books never could. I remember everything except the fuzzy spots where I tried too hard to fix stuff. Even still, I can guess around the blank parts easily enough.

"When?" she barks. She just knows.

"Bout a week."

She screeches, "Crap!" then bolts to snatch Alex up and drive away.

This happens. Scratch that. I made this happen. If I don't get us out, Al misses our cat so much he does something stupid. Al can only die if he wants to. Trouble is, he's a manic depressive who worships his cat.

What happens if he dies? Well, all this spins back to just one single night. Seems like the world goes to hell 'cause I kissed a guy in his car while I had a headache that made the lights too bright to think.

That's the theory, at least.

I lock eyes with Al as the world-weary me yanks him through the door. I know he won't remember seeing a second me. Sometimes, time butter moves him around. Sometimes it doesn't. Rude.

Standing in our trashed apartment, I glance at the memorial we made for our littlest superhero until my eyes water.

I close them to time blink. I've gotta get back on track to fixing this.

I feel like I keep missing something.

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Thank you!

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K. Leigh is a 36-year-old once-painter, sometimes-freelancer, forever-artist living in Providence, RI. They write hopeful/tragic stories full of funny, horrible characters, in various genres.

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