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## Featuring: The Calamity

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# Featuring: The Calamity

*I thought they were going to blow the whole fuckin' roof off the place. Seriously, I thought we were going to die. I hoped we would too, man, because if I'm gonna go, that's the way to do it...Rocked straight into a fuckin' casket and thrown off a bridge.*

*-Ameer Said, College Senior.*

## Amity

Irony is dead, and you need to get the fuck over it. Authenticity is in. Being real is in. Irony had its time. You ever see all those pictures, you know, of those bands in the nineties? Angsty musicians all wearing shirts with Madonna or Michael Jackson in a very “look at me, I’m wearing a Madonna shirt” kind of way, to mock her; to abjectly reject popular media as if that’s what makes you cool. Those days were when irony was in, maybe because the times called for it or some other intelligent sounding reason, but I wouldn’t know. I wasn’t there and I don’t really give a fuck. All I know is that I wear my Madonna shirt on stage because I actually really like Madonna. She was sexy and didn’t care what you thought of her sexiness. I also don’t wear it three sizes too large ironically; I think it’s a good look and the airflow is unreal. The last thing I would ever do is wear an image of Queen Goddess Madonna in an ironic way.

This is what I think about as I stand on the yet unfurnished basement floor—an empty pool waiting to be filled with ripping dissonance, sweaty concert goers, and bottom-shelf dollar beer. The idle chatter of the house proprietors and their friends registers as an anticipatory murmur. A calm before a storm. Soon, the floor will be filled to capacity and then some: a palette of tattooed young men with lip-rings, bohemian lesbians wearing dreadlocks, goths, gays, and hipsters—all joining together as one gelatinous new clique. I call these people Authenticists because despite their vast differences, they all represent a core truth about identity and what it means to wear yourself on your sleeve. In front of all these like-minded people, I will make our big announcement. Introduce the grand finale.

I notice Garrett appears by my side, though he may have been there all along. I look up to see his eyes are already on me.

“Shouldn’t we do a soundcheck or something?” he asks.

I laugh, not because of what he said, but because his hair is draped around the neck of the bass on his back, suspended three inches above his head. He looks like a goon. This is the longest I’ve ever seen his hair. “I already told them everything we need. Levels, mic placements, and everything else,” I say.

“That’s like, not what bands do...I mean, it’s a part of the whole thing to do a soundcheck. Every other band—”

“We aren’t every other band, Garrett,” I say. He’s getting annoyed with me, I can tell. I can always tell. I’d like to think it keeps our relationship human and sincere, almost like siblings. Except Garrett isn’t in rehab for cocaine abuse like my real brother.

“I’m going to do a soundcheck for us,” he says.

“Look at you, Mister Decision Man. Go ahead, but it’ll be useless. I already told them everything they need to know.”

Garrett grumbles something before turning his attention back to me.

“Do you know where Ezra is? They’ll help me,” he says.

“What am I, their babysitter?”

Garrett rolls his eyes and, I admit, this constant back and forth sarcasm could get annoying. “You know Ezra. They probably got lost upstairs talking to everyone, then they probably got offered weed or a beer or something, then they took it, and now they’re probably telling the story of the time they got your hair stuck in a blender and—”

“I get it, Amity. Are you still Amity?”

“I am. I’m offended you can’t tell the difference at this point.”

This exchange needs some context. I am as authentically Amity, twenty-year-old psychology major, as I am Casey Couture, one-woman revolution and front person of The Calamity—the greatest band that’s ever existed. Amity is opinionated, never keeps her mouth shut, and has a hard time making friends or keeping roommates. Casey Couture is opinionated, never keeps

her mouth shut, and doesn't need any friends or roommates. The qualities of Amity that Casey Couture has are much more refined, realized, and utilized with purpose, meaning, poise, and clarity. Casey Couture is everything Amity wishes she was.

I'm not gonna lie, though, she came to me one day during an acid trip. That's like, not cool or revelatory at all, right? Casey Couture was the result of a long mirror stare where I got so scared of myself I had to become someone different. I know it makes me sound lame, like those white dudes who take too many shrooms and talk to God and change their names to Shaheed or something. But, as part of the practice of being authentic—no matter the time, place, or setting—I lay myself bare to you.

Besides, she's more than just a souvenir from a psychedelic trip. For one, she's the greatest fucking rockstar who has ever fucking lived. Casey Couture isn't just a stage name. She isn't a mask I put on. Sure, our faces have similar bone structures, but when I *become* Casey Couture, I am no longer Amity. I have no memories of who Amity is. Casey Couture, though, she's a badass. She's a firework. As Amity, I get in fights a lot, but there's nothing badass about screaming at the man who gave you a hard time at work then leaving in tears. Casey Couture would never do that. She's a ball of grace covered in "fuck you" wrapping paper. Her lyrics are blunt without sacrificing poignancy. Her riffs can shred paper and massage the soul. She's so cool and talented.

"Hey, what if instead of playing drums tonight, I play the kazoo? And we can change the band name to Blue Kazoo and the Crew," I hear Ezra say behind me. I brace for their impact, as all at once I bear the full weight of Ezra. We've got it down to a science at this point; I position my arms in the same place every time, and Ezra fits their legs into the crevice I create. Their face comes so close to mine that I smell the weed and beer on their breath. I notice I haven't really moved since Garrett talked to me. Tonight is huge. It's worthy of a lengthy spell of dissociative reflection as Amity before I transform into Casey.

"Yeah, I love it. It'll be our most packed show yet, why not shake things up?"

"Let these bitches know what we're all about," they say, hopping down next to me, leaning on my shoulder. "What were you doing just standing here? Are you lost?"

"I'm just taking everything in. Letting my body soak up the energy, man. You know? This place is legendary. Fuckin' Banana Peel Yellow played here. Here! Right where we stand! And they just played South By!"

"Okay, hippy. I'm just excited to hit some shit."

"I'm excited to see you hit some shit," I say. "Tonight's gonna be perfect. It's gonna be lightning."

"It's gonna be a Calamity!"

The Calamity is, of course, the greatest fucking rock band that ever lived, and we've already proved it. We've slogged tirelessly through the basement circuit and even got to play a few dirty little dives, which was, like, a dream come true. We've released a single EP, hailed by the *Campus Columnist* as "really solid." I got recognized once as Casey Couture by a bouncer and had my fake ID taken from me. We are basically bigger than the Beatles at this point. And tonight we're playing The Slaughterhouse, the most exclusive basement in town, where acts like Fish in a Barrel and Quarantine have taken the stage and absolutely decimated. It's a big deal. A perfect night to complete our story.

Why sully a perfect thing by keeping it around forever? Every band, every TV show, every movie franchise ruins years of legacy by trying to hold our attention for longer than we have the capacity for. God, do you remember when *Cut the Crap* came out? I mean, I don't, I'm twenty, but I've read enough to know that The Clash went from being "the only band that mattered" to "the only band that mattered—with an asterisk." I can't live with an asterisk next to our name. We are an asterisk-less band. The Calamity released one perfect, compact, revolutionary EP, tactfully titled *Featuring: The Calamity*. We called it this because we want the songs to take on lives bigger than the people who played them. Song is king, and we are merely here to serve His Highness. Our EP comprises seven songs, all fueled by youthful angst, ice coffee, and a cold embrace of our mortality. Its penultimate track, "Rotted Dick," was the subject of Sue Kelling's junior thesis, "Navigating Young Adult Anxiety Through Music." We have said everything we came here to say, and we need to die to preserve our unadulterated authenticity.

Of course, this isn't the end of the road for Casey Couture. She's a star, and she knows it. Everyone knows it. I think of Björk, you know, who started as some random Icelandic girl in a punk band propelled to superstardom because she was weird as hell and didn't give a fuck what you thought about it. In the age of irony, there existed no ego, and I think that's bullshit. People go to see Björk, so Björk gives them something to see. Casey Couture may join another band, but it's more likely she will travel the world alone—untethered, unchained, authentic. A one-woman revolution. Tonight is the night to prove it. Tonight is the stepping stone to superstardom, and sometimes to birth things you have to let other things die, I guess. I don't know, that's probably stupid.

*I want Casey Couture to call me a bitch and kick me in the face.*

*-Angel McMullin, College Senior*

## Garrett

I love Amity; I love Casey. I do. She's my best friend in the whole world. She's just wrong about the soundcheck, that's all. And that's fine, I can do it myself. I can hit a drum, strum a guitar, and obviously I can chug at a bass. It would be hard to be a bass player for this band otherwise, right? I might be the worst musician in this group, and I mean that, but it doesn't bother me. I think I have the most sense—maybe—the most understanding of the norms of these things: a solid grounding for promoters, producers, label heads, or whoever, to come to when they need something more ordinary after meeting Amity and Ezra. The most technical sense, as well.

Of course, nothing Amity told the sound guy resembled anything accurate, but she doesn't need to know that.

Ezra's off upstairs again, and Amity's off in the corner changing into Casey. Over time, Casey's makeup and clothing became wilder, and their application takes up a substantial portion of her pre-show ritual. Tonight she's wearing a tie-dye tapestry she's cut into a top, which would drag across the floor if it wasn't for her silver platform shoes. Her eye makeup is done in wings and her lipstick is golden, sparkling. It's a pretty far cry from my Sonic Youth T-shirt, jeans, and Converse. It's just about the same thing every other dude in a band wears. If I'm being honest, I wish I had the confidence to wear something a little more flashy, but I think I'd just get laughed at.

I will say that Ezra and I wouldn't be here—in The Slaughterhouse—without her, regardless of how good I am at bass or Ezra is at drumming. Amity's got a spark, but she definitely gets on my nerves sometimes. Sometimes her Casey Couture persona takes over so much that I barely know where Amity stops and Casey begins. I think, though, our occasional bickering is just a result of constant proximity and extreme comfort with each other. The three of us playing music together has been the best time of my life, and I hope it never ends. Sure, it would be nice to write a song—or even a few notes every now and again—but I have to trust Amity on that front. Her songs are killer. I can handle all the technical stuff, but I don't really know if I can write a song. I'm slightly jealous but mainly I'm thrilled to be a part of these songs, because I'm not even sure she needs me. She once played me an acoustic rendition of "Rotted Dick" and it was so beautiful that I cried.

I'm comfortable with the sound but I still have to move all our gear out of the way to make room for the openers. Doing a soundcheck before taking the stage is a luxury only afforded to the headliners, meaning that this is the

first time I get to do this. Slowly, people are starting to file downstairs into The Slaughterhouse, but it's still too early for anyone to be anything but a wall hugger. From an outsider's point of view, it's just a basement, all gray everything, dusty, with open laundry machines in the corner. To an insider, though, however ordinary the basement may seem, it is completely elevated by its legacy. Everyone from Jaded Summer to the Gangrene Grandmas have played this room. It's the only house venue in the county that regularly reaches capacity. A good show here can be the springboard to a band's successful future career, which, obviously, is my hope. I'm sure it's all of ours. The Calamity is my life; I never want it to end.

I don't usually get nervous, at least, not like this. Our soundcheck sounded great and we are, I dare say, over rehearsed. But this feeling—like the future of the band rests in the hands of tonight—is pretty unshakeable.

Ezra trots back down the stairs, and I'm sure they'll go back up soon. They can't really stay in one place for too long, especially with so much social stimulation. They're not nervous, as per usual. Instead, smiling and laughing, they're now chatting away with Sybil Connor, a current renter of the house—and one of the many secret loves of my life. One that will probably stay that way: a secret. I think I just wish I was her, to be honest. I wish I could do something so bold and brash like dying my hair green and cutting half of it off, like Sybil does. Although my heart keeps beating like a Glenn Branca movement, I join them, hoping that casual conversation might alleviate my anxiety.

"Garrett, my man!" Sybil says, punching me in the arm, "It's a big night tonight! Isn't it?"

"Yeah, seems that way," I wince and rub the spot she punched, although, retrospectively, I wish I hadn't.

"Don't fuck it up," she says, laughing.

"We actually call Garrett 'Father Fuck Up' because of how shitty of a bass player he is," Ezra jokes. These kinds of insults are normal from them; it's how you know they like you. And you want them to like you. Tonight, though, that burn hits a little different.

"I'm just messing, you guys are always great. We've had some pretty major catastrophes happen over there," Sybil says, motioning toward the stage slightly obscured by the heads downstairs. "But, I mean, it's just a house full of drunk people. Not hard to make an impression. Speaking of drunk, you guys need anything?"

"Uhh, yeah, obviously," says Ezra, following Sybil back upstairs. "Garrett, Amity, you guys need anything? Beer? Shots?"

I shake my head no, but Amity gives Ezra a nod. I envy those two and their willingness to enjoy themselves. The future of our band, the way I see it right now, is at stake tonight. This is where we have a true chance to separate

ourselves from the many generic sounding, same shit, whiny bands around here. I've heard rumors that artists have landed record deals or booked some major opening gigs after playing a single night here. I hope that will happen to us, but I also couldn't bear knowing that a label head was here.

The speakers turn on, kicking off the party. Good. Something to distract me from my thoughts. Of course, it's stuff I know and like. Why wouldn't it be? Bikini Kill, Crass, Sleater Kinney. The Slaughterhouse is the coolest place in town. Ezra comes back downstairs, now on Sybil's back. Ezra is tiny, about four feet and eleven inches, and super skinny. Their skin is darker than Amity's and mine and they make fun of our whiteness constantly, but I never mind. It's funny shit, and painfully accurate. I am the whitest guy I know. But Ezra is just an adorable human being, in a pour-water-on-them-and-they-become-a-gremlin kind of way. Other people of this particular body type might be offended by others wanting to pick them up, hold them, and cuddle them. Not Ezra. I rarely see them actually walk anywhere. They hop right off Sybil's back and jump back onto Amity's, only knocking her slightly off balance. They reach around Amity's head and hold the beer to her mouth.

Amity laughs and isn't pissed. I never have the wherewithal to break her concentration like that, but I guess all Ezra and Amity have all the wherewithal in the world. Sometimes I do feel strung along with the two of them, until Amity has one of her midnight crises. Then I'm the one who gets the phone call. I have to remind myself that I'm her first choice in times of desperation, and that makes up for being the third wheel during times of fun, I guess.

Amity closes the mirror, and she is now Casey Couture. She likes us to loudly use that name before a show to "add to the overall experience that is The Calamity." She says we aren't just here to put on a concert but to "commit an act of domestic terrorism and convince everyone that's what they want." Because that makes sense. She doesn't always think too hard about what she's saying or doing, but it's impossible not to listen to her. I'm hoping her confidence will rub off on me.

Ezra comes over to me and grabs my arm.

"Are you hyped yet, Garrett? This is the hugest fucking night of our young lives!" they yell in my ear.

I smirk, but I don't really have a response. I know it's the hugest night of our lives, and I really can't handle any more emphasis on that fact.

The opener is doing their soundcheck. They're called Hello Heart; I've seen them a few times. They're young, and I'm pretty sure they're still in high school, but they're good kids. And they're a good band. It would be so much easier if they weren't.

*Casey Couture is my feminist idol.*

*-Lisette Claymore, Senior*

## Ezra

Absolute dream come true. I mean, I can barely believe it. The Slaughterhouse, man! I'm not going to say we don't deserve this—we absolutely deserve this! Have you heard Casey Couture play before? She's the fucking white girl Jimmy Hendrix, except way better and way less dead. I would listen to us even if I weren't in this band, you know? We totally capture everything I've been dying to hear my whole life. We're real. We're so real. Raw, powerful, an absolute massacre of rage and...and emotion and fire and anguish and happiness. Nothing can tether us! No chains can hold us back, man! It's total anarchy with The Calamity!

I wish I had given myself a stage name like Amity did with Casey Couture when I had the chance. I probably would have named myself something dope, too, like "Hound Dog" or "Thrasher." Just kidding, those are really stupid names. But The Calamity is more than just a band; we have a legacy to preserve. Now that we've started to gain some serious steam, I can't go from being known as Ezra on stage to "Clint Warlock" or something, even if Clint Warlock is the objective best name ever. We aren't just a punk band, we're a full-fucking-fledged experience, reliant on eons of ethos building.

Hello Heart is up there killing it right now, of course. They're still innocent, hardly out of the womb, but good goddamn can they play some music. They kind of remind me of the Ramones if the Ramones were good. Plus, there's only three of them, like us. They're tasked with the ever important job of warming up the audience, and the crowd is absolutely loving them. Barely more than three drinks in, I imagine, and everyone's already slamming into each other. This audience is a ticking time bomb, waiting to explode.

Hello Heart is playing this one song I like called "Ready Set" or "Ready Set Go" or maybe it's just called "Go." I don't know, but I really vibe with the message. I can't really hear what they're singing, but whatever message the music communicates is a message I can get behind. Even though they're younger than us, they're angrier to a pretty shocking degree, which I think really says something profound about society. I don't really know what, though.

Look at Garrett over there, back against the wall like he's reliving his high school dance years. I don't know if I've ever seen his hair longer, it's just below his shoulders. This Halloween, I pitched Cousin Itt as his obvious costume. I don't really know what the fuck his problem was, but he didn't even come out with us at all, let alone put on anything outside of the single outfit he owns.

“Garrett! Hey, Garrett! It’s me, Ezra!” I wave obnoxiously at him, jumping over the few heads between us. One side of his face curls upwards, like it’s trying to smile but doesn’t know what a smile is.

I smell his nervousness; he’s a nervous little baby, and all I want to do is give him a hug. Amity is nowhere to be seen at this point. We’re on in fifteen or so, so of course she’s ghosting. Probably in front of a mirror somewhere, making sure she looks perfect. I don’t blame her. She always looks perfect, but when she tries extra hard to look perfect she looks even more perfect. Like an angel, or, better yet, a sexy demon. Either that, or she’s up there alienating someone new. I should go ease Garrett’s nerves.

“You look like you’re reliving your highschool dance years!” I say over the music. That was a good joke. I couldn’t bear to waste it by keeping it in.

“You look like...you look like a goth...or something,” he says, clearly believing that black eye makeup is the sole indicator of a goth.

“You really got me!” I yell back. Garrett shoves his hands in his pockets. He’s doing that thing to me right now where he’s not facing me directly or making any eye contact, like a dad at a barbeque discussing the Saints versus the Dolphins.

“Do you know where Amity is? Or Casey, or whatever?” he says, looking around to make sure nobody heard him call her Amity. Dammit, look at me when you talk to me, I want to say. It’s like we haven’t spent the last year joined at the hip.

“Oh, you know her...she’s probably looking in a fucking mirror making sure her top reaches the perfect spot on her legs just above the knee. Or she got sucked into a conversation where she was able to bring up her Karen O obsession, or her Yoko Ono obsession. She’s fine.”

“Yeah, but we’re on in fifteen minutes...”

“She knows, dude. Take a chill pill—seriously, I have some Xanax in my bag if you want. Wash it down with vodka! You always say you wish you were more like a rockstar,” I say, laughing. I’m a little annoyed, though, that he’s not laughing back. Whatever, we’ll play the show and be fine. Conversations aren’t supposed to be some fucking competition where you try to win over the other person. I can’t vibe with this negative energy, so I’m going upstairs for one last pre-game beer. I get to the living room and there’s a huddle of people near the door, and I hear some yelling. Whatever’s happening seems like a good adrenaline boost, and I’m pretty short so I usually get front-and-center privileges to these kinds of events.

I shove my way through the cattle, and who do I see but Amity, finger firmly planted in the divot of some lanky saltine’s chest. He keeps backing up toward the door.

“Who even are you? Do you think I give a single shit about your opinion? You wanna say it again, huh? Get the fuck out of here!” she’s screaming at this guy.

I have no idea what the situation is, but I gotta bounce in and start screaming at this motherfucker alongside her. “Too busy in highschool popping all your pimples to learn some goddamn manners, you slug? Trying to get smacked?” I yell, literally jumping to get in this guy’s face. He’s definitely nervous but still smirking, only giving our rage longer legs.

“Chill out! It was nothing! I didn’t mean anything by it!” he yells back, looking proud of his piss-poor, sorry-shit defense. I would never call anyone a cocksucker in a derogatory way—who doesn’t love the occasional dick in the mouth?—but, holy fuck, this guy is a cocksucker.

“Oh, you didn’t mean anything by it? Then why’d you say it, huh? Why’d you say it? Wanna say it to me outside? Let’s go!” Amity says.

“I’ll break my streak of pacifism for you,” I pile on. “You motherfucker. Come on!” If nothing else, I am a shit talk maestro. We are gonna play such a great show after this. A great anecdote for *The Calamity Memoirs*.

We keep yelling at this dildo until some huge, bearded dude intervenes and expends zero effort forcing this guy out of the house. We thank him because he seems cool and offer him a beer because we don’t have much else to offer. He declines but in a super chill way. Like, he said “no,” but he had this, like, really saucy inflection in his voice. I kind of want to be his friend but I think he’s thirty. He bids us *adieu* and I give Amity a wild hug.

“Dude, Amity...” I say, after the fervor has died down a touch. “What a hoot! Let’s find some other fucker to kick out!”

“Amity?” She responds, and I know what she means. I wish she knew that, as baller as Casey Couture is, she’s still just Amity the whole time. I mean, isn’t it better that Amity take credit for this rather than some stage name?

“What did he say to you anyway, huh? The nerve of some people, man...”

Amity gives me a sideways smile, “He told me that The Calamity wasn’t his kind of music. Why’s he here then, you know?”

“That’s it? Are you fucking serious?” Jesus, now I have to feel guilty. And I should never have to feel guilty for such a biting verbal smackdown.

“I mean, he was kind of a dick about it.”

“You’re being a bit of a dick about it yourself!” I say, backing off. “Kicking a guy out for that. I was ready to kill him for you! Seriously!”

She laughs, like maybe she doesn’t think I’m serious. That’s what I get for being so side-splittingly hilarious all the time.

“I could just tell there was nothing authentic about him. It’s an energy that you can pick up from a face like his,” she says.

I won’t lie, sometimes she’s super fucking annoying. “You’re fucking insane. Did you know that?”

“Of course!” She says, and now I laugh.

Eh, you know what, fuck that guy.

I hear Hello Heart finish on my favorite song which means it’s time for us to take the stage, and I know beyond a shadow of a doubt we are going to blow the whole fuckin’ roof off this joint.

*It was way too sweaty and smelly down there...do people actually enjoy this?*

*-Derrick Dobmeier, Freshman*

## Casey Couture

It was a flash of heat, a bucket of water in a deep fryer. It could have been two minutes, it could have been two hours. It was profoundly violent and bloody, yet serenely peaceful. It was, after all, the death of The Calamity—the greatest rock band that’s ever been kind enough to treat this Earth with their presence. And now The Calamity will forever be buried in The Slaughterhouse, or perhaps cremated, or perhaps so decimated that all that remains is a photograph for the memorial.

We not only played our songs tonight, we ripped through them with a ferocity hardly seen since the days of Iggy and the Stooges or a young Karen O with the Yeah Yeah Yeahs (the second greatest band on Earth). Of course, I opened with my signature move: a true crowd pleaser, raucous and wild, where I chug an entire beer and spray the last mouthful up like a geyser while Ez and Garrett vamp on something new each time. Sometimes people ask us, “are they really making it up on the spot?” They are. Each time. The reaction is incredible.

Garrett, Ezra, and myself were locked into each other, bound by invisible chains, whipped by an invisible BDSM dominatrix until we were welted and crying with pleasure. We opened the night with a cover, an unprecedented yet carefully considered move, as we wanted everyone to start the show singing with us. A bonding strategy, a personal connection from artist to audience.

And no, it wasn’t an ironic cover. Garrett, Ezra, Amity, and I genuinely love Carly Rae Jepsen’s discography, which is why we chose to cover the canonical “Call Me Maybe.” Pop music doesn’t get enough credit at these kinds of events. I would even argue that, in spirit, pop is the same as punk: simple, three chord music more focused on feeling and physicality than some kind of mental trip. Music that makes your body want to explode in flurries of expression, to dance.

The crowd moved all at once, swaying back and forth, mouthing the words. We played it faster, naturally, and more hardcore, naturally, than the

original. It was the combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar, it moved everyone to practice their authentic expressionism. Garrett chugged through the opening notes, introducing a flash of “I know this, but from where?” into the room’s consciousness. As soon as I threw the wish in the well, the cheers nearly drowned out the monitors. We couldn’t hear a note we were playing for a few seconds. Everything was going perfectly.

Of course, following this we played a few non-EP cuts to build the tension and get the crowd hungry for the hits: “Hopelandia” to “Grounded Forever” to “Death is Funny.” At the end of “Death,” Ezra dropped their drumstick, so I took it and hit Garrett’s low E string five or six times in an effort to be spontaneous, but mostly to make him smile (which he did). He was nervous, and I could tell. I wanted him to loosen up. I like him more when he’s loose. Pure musicality can manifest itself in infinite ways. Rigidity is not one of those ways.

Then, of course, we hit the opening power chord of “Can’t Knock It,” our EP opener, with such precision and force that I thought the gates to Hell were going to open up from beneath and swallow us right then and there. Of course, then we blazed through the rest: “Lustful Existence” to “Global Warming” to “Rotted Dick” to “Please the Police” to “Rock Hard,” finishing with, of course, our EP closer, “I Hate Myself.” Between “Dick” and “Police,” we included an improvised flourish, a jam so tight that it felt as if the three of us were melting together into a giant robotic musical being. I will miss that about being in this band, of course, that sense of complete and unconfused musical communication.

I would never say I’m moving on to bigger or better things. After all, The Calamity is the greatest band that’s ever existed. It’s time for me to move on to different things. Forever is an egregiously boring thing. Now the concept of temporary, of endings, of death, that’s beautiful. Death is beautiful. It provides a whole new significance to life. That’s how we stay the greatest band that’s ever existed. That’s why Nirvana never sucked, and why Weezer sucks hardcore now. I can’t stay in one place for too long when I have a whole world at my disposal. New people to meet and, more importantly, new people to wow and amaze and influence. The Calamity will be known for beginning the revolution. Casey Couture will be known for finishing it.

Ezra and Garrett will forgive me, I know they will. They’re mad now, but they just need time. They’ll get it. They’re smart.

*If The Calamity ends then life has no meaning.*

*-Greta Hartwick, Senior*

Ezra

This bitch.

“What do you mean, end of The Calamity? Is this some kind of joke or something? Why did you tell them that this was our last show after we just played the best show of our entire fucking lives?” We’re outside, in front of the house. Amity is sitting on the curb, her face in her hands. Garrett is behind me, not saying much as usual. He’ll tell me all about how he’s on my side later, but right now he can’t even work up the nerve to say anything. Whatever, man. Whatthefuckever.

“I thought you guys would get it,” Amity says, through her hands.

I have no idea if she’s herself or keeping up that Casey Couture façade bullshit, but I also don’t care.

“Get what? How our friend is tossing us in the dirt for...no fucking reason? Because she’s selfish and wants to be in the spotlight? We give you the fucking spotlight, Amity.” She doesn’t correct me, which is good. Casey Couture would be much more insufferable in this situation.

“But now the life of The Calamity means so much more and—”

“Cut that faux philosophical intellectual bullshit. It makes you sound way more stupid than you are.”

She’s silent for a moment after this, sinking deeper into her slump. Still dressed with all the makeup, she doesn’t look like a star.

“Sorry. I should have talked to you guys,” she says finally.

“Uh, yeah. No shit. We’re called The Calamity because we’re, you know, a band. Not a glorified solo act. What the fuck were you thinking?”

“It’s for the future. Casey Couture is—”

“Casey Couture is YOU, Amity. A stage name. An alter ego. Say ‘I am, don’t act like this was out of your control. I’m sick of this shit. Childish.’ I knew I had delivered a blow, but I wasn’t proud of it like I was when we kicked that cock blister to the curb earlier. As hard as that was to say, that’s one of the only ways you can get to her. Cut deep or else it won’t cut at all. She starts to cry; a teardrop at first, and then all at once. She can’t stop. I want to sit down next to her and punch her in the arm and give her a hug and then punch her again, but I can’t.

“I just thought it would be the perfect end and we could focus on the future,” she says between gasps, “and you guys are the most important thing in the world to me, and I feel like I lost you guys and—”

“It’s not too late, Amity,” Garrett finally chimes in, “there’s no reason the band has to end...could have just been a stunt, or whatever. Part of the experience.”

“No,” she immediately replies, wiping away a tear, “it has to end like this. It’s organic. Authentic. The fitting end.” The sadness leaves her face and her eyes regain their intensity.

“Authentic how? Seriously, Amity, authentic how? Is Casey Couture authentic? Announcing the end of a whole band without letting the fucking band know is authentic? Do you even know what that word means? Because I don’t think you do.” I am going for the jugular. I have to. She has proved that for the two years we’ve been friends—best friends, I thought—I was just being strung along in the name of some greater vision that only exists in one person’s brain.

She stands up. Wetness stains her cheekbones but other than that there’s nothing about her to suggest she’s ever cried. I think she might hit me. Do it.

“Casey Couture has more authenticity in one finger than either of you two have experienced in your entire lives,” she says, pointedly.

“Can’t you just be real for once, Amity?” Garrett asks, stepping forward. “We aren’t fucking talking about Casey Couture. We’re talking about you. You talk about being authentic, but neither of us feel like we even know who you are anymore. Did we ever?”

Amity steps back, and the tenseness in her muscles softens. I don’t know if she’ll cry again, hurl another insult, fight us, or what, but I don’t care. I don’t know why I ever cared. We obviously mean nothing to her. We stand in silence together, shifting slightly, mostly motionless. I’m sure, in all our brains, we’re exploring options of what to say next, but nothing is landing quite right. I’m glad Garrett stepped forward to say something. I think he needed that, and I think she needed to hear it. Amity starts to tear up again but doesn’t sob like before.

“Are you guys still gonna be my friends?” she asks, looking at the ground.

“I don’t know. Are you gonna be ours?” I ask.

## Garrett

This open mic is going to be the first time I’ve played music publicly in a while. Some little coffee shop in town that only serves vegetarian food. It’s only been a month or so since that show at The Slaughterhouse, but when my weeks used to be packed with a show or two—plus rehearsals—three weeks not performing is like an eternity. Ezra and I have a thing, I guess, just a bongos and acoustic guitar kind of thing. Neutral Milk-ish. They’re singing, something I never even realized they could do, especially so well. As raw as the essence of Ezra is, their voice is, dare I say, pretty. A far cry from Amity’s

Kathleen Hanna howls. I'm still the moody background, but unlike before, I'm not sure I want to be anything else. I'm very nervous.

I'd be lying if I said I don't hope every day that I'll get a text message saying something along the lines of, "band practice, now." That's usually how we were beckoned. We never did have a set time each week or whatever. That kind of annoyed me at the time, but, of course, now I miss it. It's like a breakup, or a death in the family. As much as I try to carry on, there's this dark cloud looming over me, only reminding me of its presence when things start to feel okay again.

I haven't seen Amity since that night, either. Obviously, Ezra and I are still trying to hold onto our relationship, but I'd be lying if I said that the majority of our conversation wasn't caked with shit talk. Shit talking Amity, the band, how annoying it was being in a band with Amity—anything we can say to convince ourselves that we don't miss the everloving fuck out of it. There's still something missing in Ezra and my dynamic now, some kind of awkwardness, almost like we're playing music with each other out of obligation. We're good, but we're not "gaseous," or "grotesquely nauseating," or any of the other weird things Amity would say when talking about how great we were. How great she was.

Everyone sounds the same at this open mic. A lot of dudes who look similar to me singing about some girl they saw across a room somewhere, once. *I noticed your shirt, it was covered in dirt.* Those kinds of lyrics. Apparently, creepy obsessiveness is okay when you sing about it. Some dude thinks it's a comedy open mic. He's funny like how shoving a thumbtack between your toe and toenail is funny. Ezra and I aren't going to make any waves, but at least we might be somewhat unique, I hope. There's one artist between this guy and us, then we'll go up to play a solid but forgettable set, then I'll go home and make pizza rolls and think about all the other things I could be doing. Oh Christ, he's singing about his ex-girlfriend. *She's a bitch, she's a witch, she never did scratch this itch.* He actually sang that.

When he finishes, there's some polite clapping, and Ezra looks at me and snickers. Neither of us are clapping. Now there's only a few minutes before we go up, so I grab my acoustic to tune it up real quick. The host of the event, some awkward fraternity dude in letters and glasses, steps up to the mic.

"Thanks Owen, that was great," he says, looking at his ripped sheet of notebook paper. "We only have a couple more artists up. Thanks guys, for coming in. We still have a lot of coffee left, so please drink it—it cost us like twenty dollars. Anyway coming to the stage is... Casey Culture?" To our mutual surprise, Amity steps to the stage, in full Casey Couture get up: gay pride flag as cape, winged eyeliner, platform shoes, the whole nine, with an acoustic guitar strapped to her back. We hadn't even seen her here. Probably because she spent the whole Open Mic dressing up.

“Oh God,” Ezra says, with a sigh, “here she is.”

“Couture,” Amity says into the mic, “Casey Couture.” She starts tuning up her guitar, even though we were explicitly told to tune before we hit the stage. Of course nobody is telling her no. Nobody knows how, apparently.

“Hey, Owen,” she says, back into the mic, looking at the last performer from across the room, “your ex sounds really cool. You seem like a dick, though.”

Ezra snickers, though I know they don’t want to. I look over at Owen, expecting some kind of outburst but his face just reddens as he tries to laugh it off. Casey Couture finishes tuning.

“This one’s called “Endings.” I hope you enjoy it.”

She strums the first chord, an open G. Very basic chord, maybe THE basic chord, but somehow she hits every string so perfectly that they bounce off the walls with a golden timbre. Her eyes shut tight as she plays, her upper half swaying back and forth in rhythm with the song. When she sings, it’s more melodic than I’m used to and yet, somehow, with an acoustic guitar by herself on a stage in a coffee shop, she still carries the same energy she did when we were playing loud punk in dirty basements.

I look at Ezra, expecting a scowl, or disinterest, but they’re just as invested as I am. Throughout the song they don’t turn to me and joke or say anything nasty, and I don’t either. She’s in full Casey Couture mode, and she’s never seemed more like Amity. She is laying every inch of her selves bare for us right now. The room seems like we may all collectively burst into tears. I don’t know if Amity even knows Ezra and I are here but I don’t think I even want her to. I forget we’re playing next, like how could we possibly follow her?

I don’t know if we’ll ever forgive Amity. I don’t know if we should, and I don’t know if she deserves it. I don’t know if The Calamity will ever come back, or if we’ll have any more of those late nights playing Mario Party and drinking way too much beer and smoking way too much weed. And that hurts, it really does. Knowing that what I’ve always considered to be the best nights of my life are over and never coming back. But I do know one thing for certain, and it’s maybe the only thing I’ve ever known: Casey Couture is a star.