



NIGHT
SHIFT
RADIO

NIGHT SHIFT RADIO

Washington

A cold Northwestern night sky waits for me as I climb the ladder.

The crisp nights barely bid me a hello. I have grown to learn that this is the best I will get out of it now. Instead, I take reassurance in the creaking ladder as I scrape my hands going up.

The Pacific greets me more fondly, pawing at the rocks below me as it quickly says hello and returns to fighting the moon. I watched the two battle. Their never ending quarrel entertains me most of these nights. There used to be city lights and smog keeping me from seeing the money, but we've rekindled our relationship.

And finally, I found my old friend on the radio. He scratches an eager hello on the window sill. "Hello. If anyone is out there, here's the update. 8PM. August 20th." I say, halfheartedly. "I'm in Washington state, on the far northeastern peninsula in the radio tower three miles from the abandoned University, responding for coordinates at FM 1909. I have food, medicine, and beds. But for now, as I wait for you all, enjoy this music. Tonight we have the 60s."

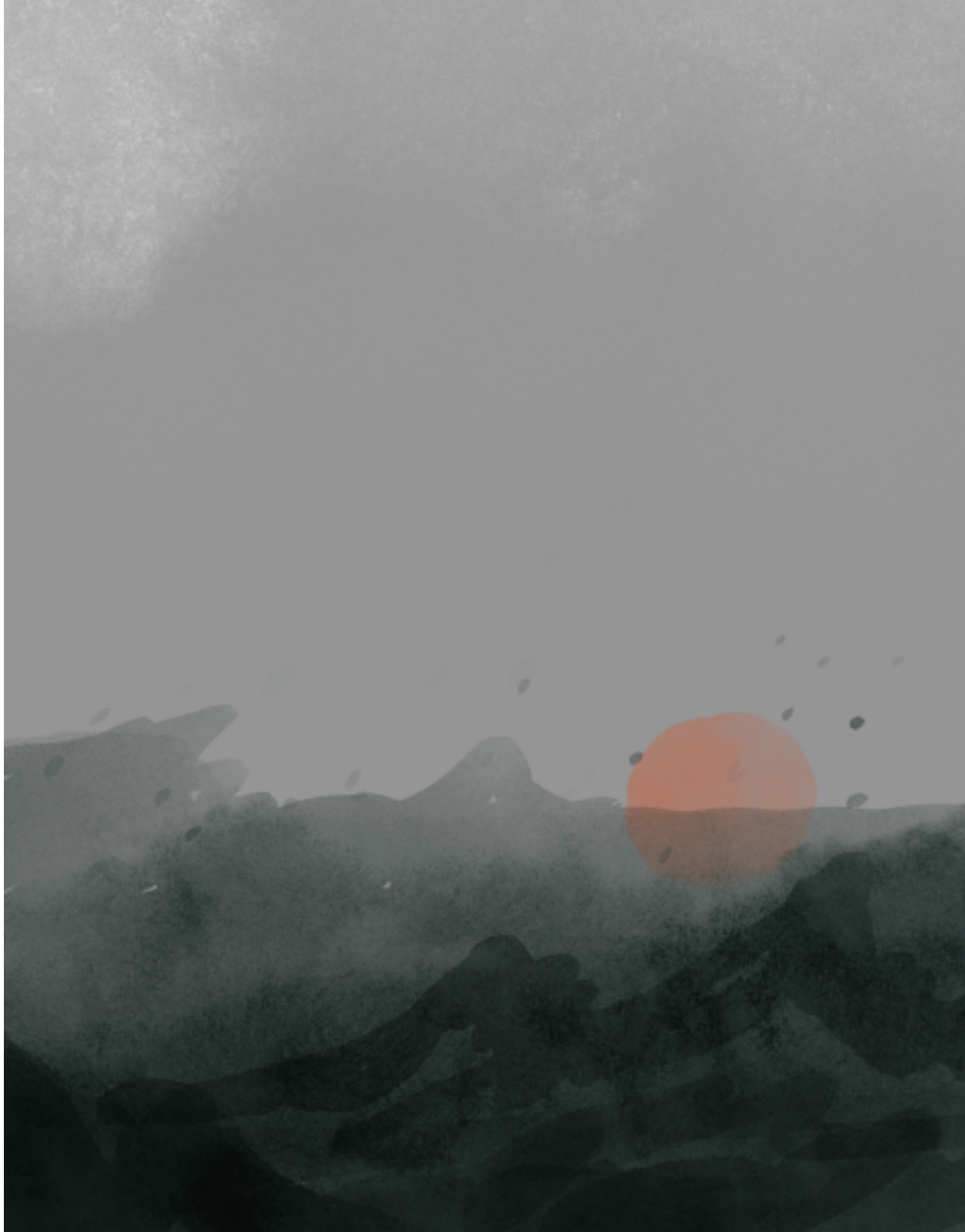
I play *Eleanor Rigby* by the Beatles.

"...*All the lonely people...*" fades in and out of the atmosphere. I think about the times I'd spend playing this on the guitar in the crumbling hospital to try to keep the morale of the sick and dying, doctors and patients alike, up.

The memories can flood in quickly, and it's hard to reemerge from that ocean.

I lock the door behind me when I leave to patrol around the radio tower. It shakes in the wind. I think it's ready to rest. I try to remind myself that I could fix the tower, if I wanted to. But the loose wires and empty chairs that were once full discourage me.

No one has shown up for years. There is no longer the echo of my classmates and professors laughing and yelling as we swung from the tower. It is just me and the Pacific, drowning out every song I play. Perhaps it is time the tower and I fell to the ground to sleep.



Augustine

A humid, buzzing Southeastern night plays on without me as I climb the ladder.

The soft, splintering wood gives in gently as I grip the sturdy tower and heave myself onto the deck. I swipe open the tattered nets hanging pathetically from the doorframe and walk in. The mosquitos hum quietly as I sit down. They leave me alone as I wipe salt and fog tears off the radio and desk. My blood is stale and flavorless to them.

I carefully eye the Atlantic. There is not a whitecap to be seen. I sigh in relief, she is sleeping peacefully. I won't have her angry eyes staring at me tonight, so I dare to turn my back to the coast. I am still weary, and careful not to wake her, as the radio croaks awake and grumpily plays a torrid tune.

My throat aches. "Hi. Tip of Saint Augustine, Florida. 11PM, it is August 20th. I will be here until sunrise. Come say hello." I say in a radio voice I haven't tried before. I doubt anyone is out there to hear me, but still, if I cannot entertain myself, I'll go mad.

I decided to spend the night flipping through American radio stations. It has been almost a year since I last checked in. After searching the Atlantic for signs of anyone and coming up empty handed. I decide maybe the homeland is worth a shot.

She stirs furiously in her sleep as I scan. She knows I'm here, in this tower. That is why she's sent the salt and water to tear away at me for the past three years. She destroyed the rest of my kind, and now I am merely an unfaded stain on her newly cleansed world. A soft-skinned reminder that her work isn't finished.

The sob of exhaustion holds me to this tower. Every croak of the radio is perhaps the croak that saves another's life. I see how her face twists and grimaces at the thought of another like me, and so she has done all she can to tear me, this tower, and the radio town. But with each thrashing cicada, gnawing hurricane, and reluctant summer, guilt turns my mosquito-feast blood bitter with guilt, so I rebuild us. With weeds, washed up mangroves, and white mud. I'd rather have our swampy skeleton pull the last of humanity from the sea than endure the vicious, clean teeth of guilt.

But there is no one out there, I remind myself when I swing myself maddently around the tower, feeling it sway and crackle beneath me. Selfishness is not real.

But I settle, the way she must sleep after her rages, and then I touch my stomach: it is hot and I can feel the sediments of sand and salt, dried and caking on my blistering skin. I sigh, disappointed there are no teeth marks, no driftwood splinters, and so I sit in the scratching silence as I flick through the radio, and begin to search inland America.