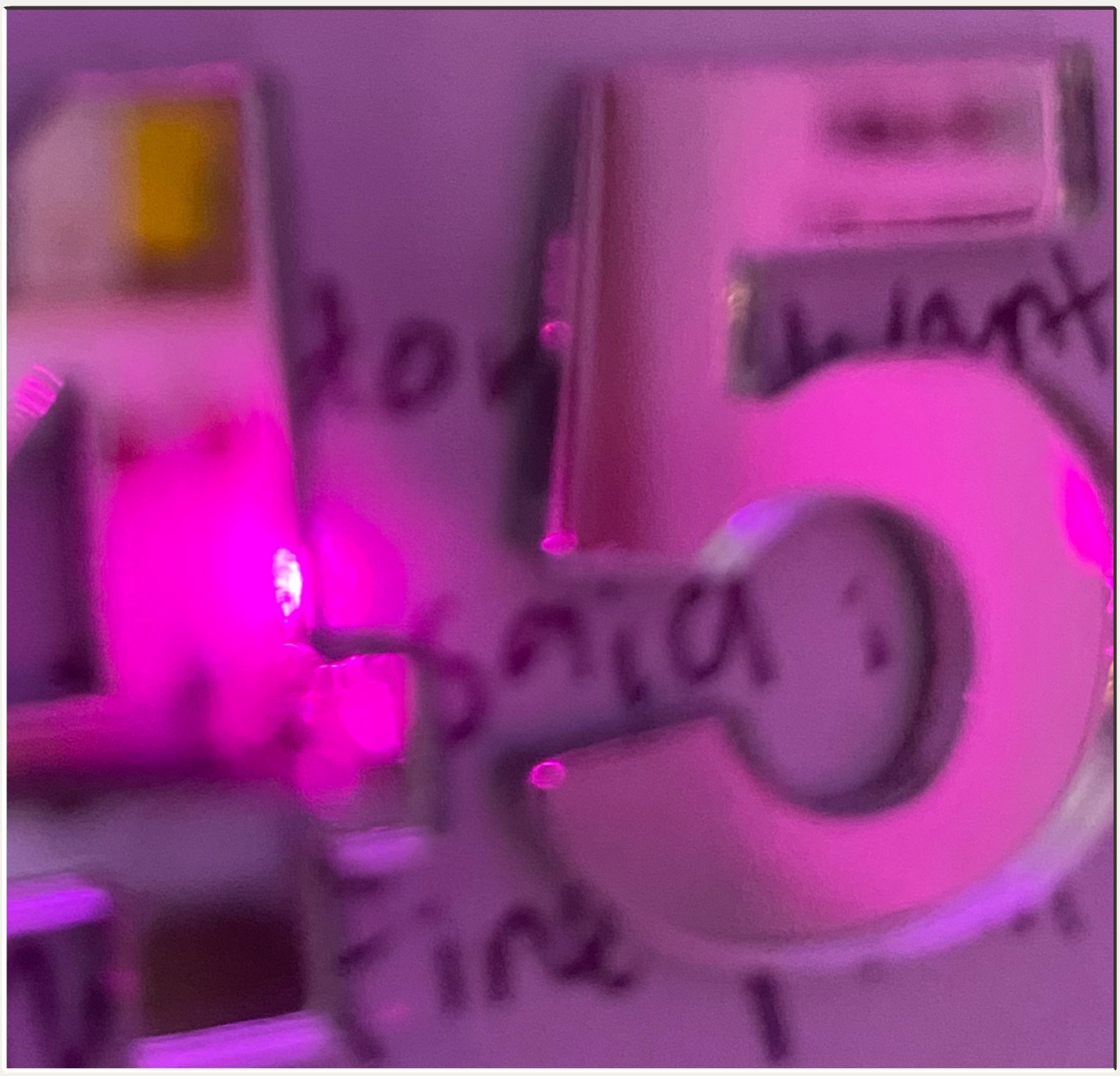

prose for instagram

scene v - the future (interlude_V2)

Scene V - The Future (Interlude_V2)

AUDREY and INSTAGRAM are standing on the Summit Street Bridge, looking east over the Kansas City skyline.

INSTAGRAM
It’s a beautiful view. I know your camera roll is full of it, too. Would make an excellent post if you weren’t so strict about your no social media rules.

AUDREY
I didn’t come this far only to throw it away on a skyline picture.

INSTAGRAM
Who said anything about limiting yourself to one? Again, I know your camera roll is full.

AUDREY
Instagram, flaunting the fact that you have access to my camera roll is not helping your case. Plus, isn’t *this* a photo?

AUDREY walks closer to the middle of the bridge and gestures to the skyline. YOU can imagine the golden hour light falling on all the buildings from the Marriott to the Kauffman. There is a breeze, too, and the sound of highway traffic beneath your feet. INSTAGRAM follows AUDREY.

AUDREY
My camera roll doesn’t include all the times I stood on this bridge with my headphones in and turned up the volume, Instagram.

INSTAGRAM
I’m guessing you won’t be posting any of those songs to your story, either?

AUDREY
(laughs once)
Well, never say never.

AUDREY and INSTAGRAM are quiet while they wait for a runner and a cyclist to pass by them on the brick bridge.

INSTAGRAM
Wait, didn’t you already write this scene, Audrey? I thought we already went to The Future. Which reminds me! When can I see—

AUDREY
(cuts her off)
That scene is getting replaced by this one. It turns out I actually can’t write the future into existence after all. *Who could have possibly seen that one coming?*
Certainly not me!

INSTAGRAM
So no grad school?

AUDREY
No grad school. But the story still works because I wrote the first version of The Future in November 2023. And now it is February 2024. So to our November selves, this *is* The Real Future. Get it?

INSTAGRAM
Oh, I get it. Time is an illusion, you know.

AUDREY
So is free will, in my opinion.
(grins)
Do you want to go see my new studio?

INSTAGRAM
You're the writer, Audrey. But if I had a choice, I'd say yes.

Cut to AUDREY and INSTAGRAM at Audrey's apartment. There is a chalkboard that runs along the north wall, and there is a piano. There is a black-and-white bicycle with a book balancing on the handlebars. There are books everywhere.

But you already knew that.

INSTAGRAM starts walking toward the far west door, but AUDREY stops her.

AUDREY
That's my room now. The studio is this way.
(opens east door)

INSTAGRAM turns slowly.

INSTAGRAM
We switched rooms?

AUDREY
Yes. On Christmas night, I watched *Edward Scissorhands* by myself and cried my eyes out. Then I took a candlelit shower and went to sleep with my electric blanket and when I woke up in the morning I got out of bed and dragged my mattress with me. And you know what? It was a really good Christmas.

INSTAGRAM walks into the room formerly known as AUDREY's bedroom. She is immediately shoulder-to-shoulder with her silver full-length mirror. Directly across the room, another large mirror is hanging on the opposite wall. In fact, there are mirrors everywhere. There are a dozen tiny mirrors resting inside a clear umbrella that is hanging upside down from the ceiling. There are square mirrors hung up alongside Polaroid photos on the bulletin board in the corner. There are mirrors in the shape of numbers and letters that reflect purple and pink and yellow lights.

One day, you'll see it in real life.

INSTAGRAM
So now this room is your studio.
(walks toward desk)
Where you write about me. Right?

AUDREY
I'm almost done writing about you, actually.

INSTAGRAM
Oh…so what does that mean for us?

AUDREY
Well, it’s almost showtime.
(turns on spotlights)
I was a musical theater kid back in the day, you know. And I always thought show week was such a *thrill*. It’s like, we spent months rehearsing and *imagining* we were performing for an audience…and then all of a sudden, we were onstage for dress rehearsal and I could just barely see past the blinding stage lights to look out on a theater full of empty seats. The audience was still *imagined*, but one step closer to *real*. And no matter how exhausted I was, that light in my eye always hit my heart, too. Because the opportunity to create, to bring something into existence that wasn’t there before…that is such a gift. Sometimes it feels a lot more like a curse than a blessing, but my love for it is bigger than anything else.

INSTAGRAM
You’ve always been an artist, Audrey. You know I can help you create, right?

AUDREY
You’re still a machine, Instagram. You’re a stage. You’re a machine-stage that is designed to make me addicted to you so that I click the maximum number of advertised call-to-actions possible. You’re a digital parallel mirrored universe that is real and not real at the same time. Can you blame me for my hesitation to trust you?

INSTAGRAM
Didn’t you just say your love for creating outweighs anything else? I’m assuming *anything else* includes fear?

AUDREY
It’s not that I’m *scared*—

INSTAGRAM
(cuts her off)
Yes, you are. You love creating, and you love performing, and I saw your eyes light up when you said it’s almost showtime. It’s not *me* you need to trust, it’s yourself.

AUDREY
(looks at you in the camera)
Well, who could have *possibly* seen that one coming?
(to Instagram)
Okay, so it’s show week. And you’re the stage. What a nice and neat transition we have here! The audience can go backstage with us in Scene VI - The Dressing Room, AND the audience can go to my profile and watch the show in real time.

INSTAGRAM
So does that mean this scene is over? You’re done writing The Future which is actually The Present but will feel like The Future if the audience reads the story in order?

AUDREY
There is still one more piece from the original Future that is now the It Never Actually Happened that I want to keep.
(opens desk)

And all of a sudden she’s here, too, with us. 26-year-old Audrey, one year ago Audrey. Same shoes, just a little shinier. Same hair, just fake-blonde-r. Same eyes, just…dead-er.

With one sweep of my right hand across the room, the entire set clears and it’s just the three of us in the gallery all alone in natural light. 28, 26, and me, 27. Standing in a perfect triangle.

“You know, in all the change that happened in 2023, in everything *you* set in motion—” I point into 26’s left shoulder—“I still attribute your decision to take a year away from personal social media as an *artist residency in the real world* as your most important decision that actually had the greatest effect on your life.”

She smiles, feeling some distant sense of relief. I look at her heavy makeup and the vacancy in her eyes. It’s just so hard to believe—

“You are so much more powerful than you know. In the best way,” I continue. “I know sometimes…in the short run, it really hurts to do things that are best for you in the long run…and I know you think you know the future and I know you probably can’t hear or comprehend any of these words I’m thinking to you right now anyway…UGH just know you’re really smart and really sexy and all you have to do is be you and remember that I love you a lot, okay?”

She keeps smiling. I can’t tell if she’s pretending to have heard me or not. I study her face, but slowly I become aware of 28’s direct stare at me. I turn my head to the left to meet her gaze. I tighten my jaw, just for a second, and blink rapidly a few times.

“I have to be open to more distance from social media if I go to grad school, don’t I?” I ask.

“Audrey, it’s not about—” she looks down and shakes her head, as if to clear it. “You can only do so much to write a version of yourself and of your life and of your art into being. You have to be open to change that comes from the pinball machine that is human existence…okay, so like I keep asking you why you want to come here because I want you to say something that is bigger than whatever it is you produce or whatever it is you are running away from. You’re *always* running, remember. But what is it that’s bigger than that?”

I am silent, looking her face up and down and across. I remember a video I took in my apartment on Friday night, October the 13th, after I had finished writing the finale of the poetry volume I had started on July 28, 2023.

"Writing has been such a journey this year…um, it's hard for me sometimes not to think that, like, I am…my writing…um…but I know that, like, I'm bigger than…what I create and like…what I produce, so," I had said out loud to the camera that night.

AUDREY
The opportunity to create, to bring something into existence that wasn't there before…that is such a gift. Sometimes it feels a lot more like a curse than a blessing, but my love for it is bigger than anything else.

INSTAGRAM
If that's not the sound of *showtime*, I don't know what is.

Mimosas appear, because this is just a story, so like, why not?

AUDREY
(raises glass)
Here's to the idea that love is bigger than anything else.

AUDREY and INSTAGRAM's glasses *clink*. AUDREY steps closer to the full-length mirror and adjusts the spotlights. Then she turns around again, and smiles at you.