

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/4

Duncan Rivers

A Timeline of My Crimes (in A Minor)

“For one count of aggravated assault, how does the defendant plead?”

I was better on the strings than my brother could have ever dreamed of being. If what they're accusing me of now is jealousy, then what he held for me in our youth must have been some greater form of disdain they don't even have a word for. He was making his way up his driveway after selling out The Punch Lot for the second straight night. It was October, that kind of eerie feeling was in the air, and I was just the right amount of drunk to act on the impulses I'd held since he signed his first record deal without me. I punched him straight in the back of his skull before he reached his gate and I was pretty sure Miranda didn't hear us, but I checked through the window to make sure. My brother was out cold, bleeding on the pavement.

“The defendant pleads guilty.”

“For one count of kidnapping, how does the defendant plead?”

I tied him up in my basement that first night. I know, it sounds sick. There was almost a poetic justice in the way it untangled. I took over Mom's house after she passed, since he already had places in Boston and Milan. I don't think he'd been down there since we were kids, and our old amps were still rigged up the same way they were all those years ago. After feeding him, I swapped his clothes with mine and returned to his house to take over his life. He may have been born eleven minutes before me, but there wasn't any telling us apart.

“The defendant pleads guilty.”

“For one count of identity theft and fraud, how does the defendant plead?”

I divorced Miranda on my brother's behalf within the week, knowing from the start that I had no intentions of keeping her near me. If anyone would have noticed I wasn't him, it would have been her. A few days later, the real me was reported missing, and although they spent a good long time looking, they never found me. I took a few months to write, to tell the audience that I was mourning the loss of my brother and letting the dust settle on the divorce. It served as a decent enough disguise for my erratic behavior and the fact that I didn't have all of my brother's mannerisms down.

“The defendant pleads guilty.”

“For one count of theft, a guitar, how does the defendant plead?”

To call her a guitar was insulting. I remember it clear as day, we were fifteen years old, smoking pot in the yard, telling my brother she was my dream. A 1930 Kel Kroydon, Birds of Paradise, made by Gibson. After the moderate commercial success of his bland second album, he bought one. He bought my instrument, not for me, but for himself. It was the last straw in a long line of broken straws. I took it and buried it behind Bertelli's and they still haven't found it. I told them I lost it a few months back.

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/4

"The defendant pleads guilty."

"And, for one count of defamation of character, how does the defendant plead?"

Defamation of character? I try not to laugh as I watch my lawyer rise for the last time. In the seventeen months I kept my brother locked away, living his life for him, I released two albums. On the surface, you could call my experiment a miss, not because I was finally caught, but because of the commercial failure of my work. For the first time in his discography, I dared to tell a story that scratched more than just the surface. My lyrics were coarse, serrated like a knife. I even set songs in minor keys, which apparently was too much for audiences to handle, God forbid I strummed a diminished chord. The critics however, they knew. They knew something had changed in my brother's depth. They could see the music was digging into something he could never imagine. I still have a few of those reviews pinned to my wall.

"The defendant pleads—"

"Not guilty." I call out, then I turn to face them. Miranda and my brother, her clutching his arm like she knows the cameras are rolling, and he doesn't bother to look up at me, at least it looks that way through his sunglasses. He doesn't look like he has much life left in him at all, but if you ask me, he never did. He never had the music; it was always mine.



I pace around the penitentiary courtyard, tracing the steps I've grown accustomed to over my last three years, when a song on the radio ends and the host's voice takes over. He introduces a new song, something fresh off the presses, and although I'd put his name out of my head since I landed myself here, I can't make myself ignore it. My brother had released a new single, for the first time since his release. I break away from my route and make for the doors as quickly as I can, but I can't get there before the song kicks up.

To my shock, my feet stop themselves and I'm captivated by the first note. The A Minor hangs over the frigid prison air like a kite and everyone else holds in place. It's beautiful and painful. Delicate and haunting. Rough and complex. I can't believe it's him at first, but then I remember all that I put him through. I remember that it was me. I gave him this material.

We always promised we'd record, the pair of us, before he broke away from me, but now I have to smile. Even though his name will be on every credit, I know it's just as much mine as it is his. We finally did it - we made our music together - and it's perfect.

They're going to love us.