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The Stages of Emily Doe

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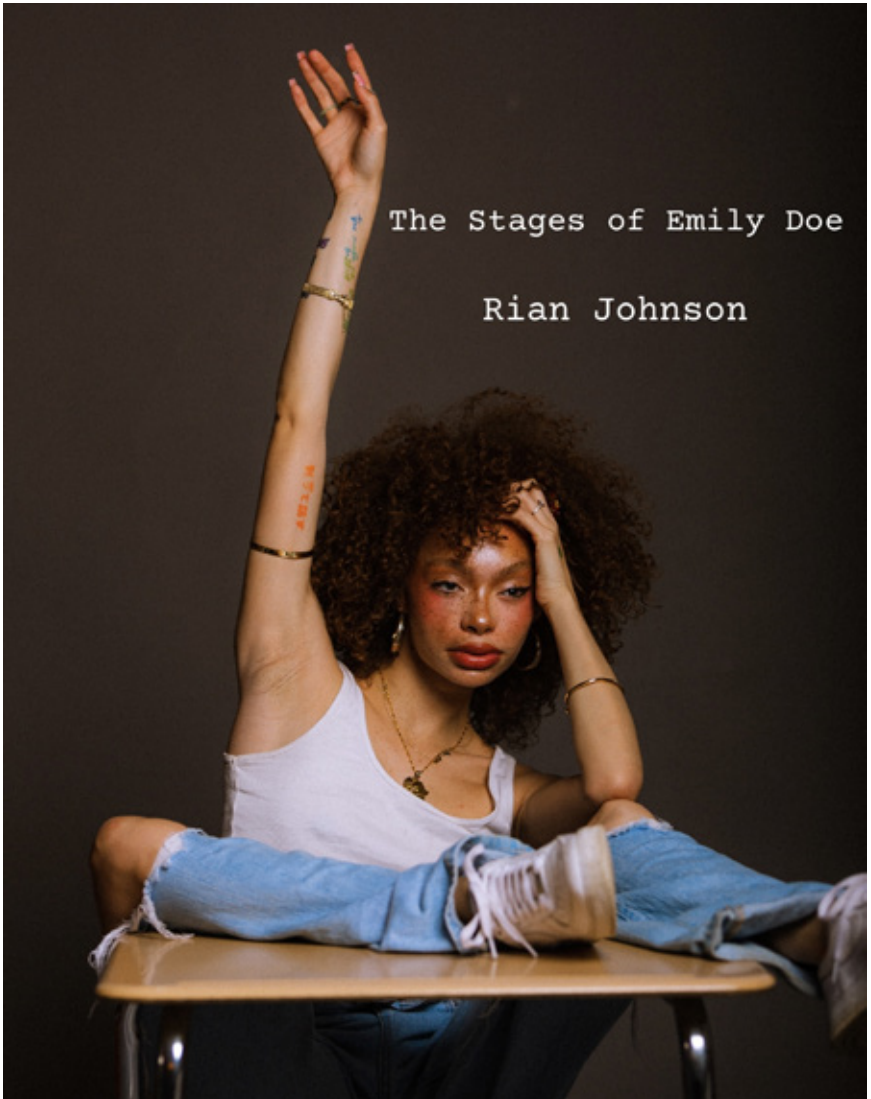
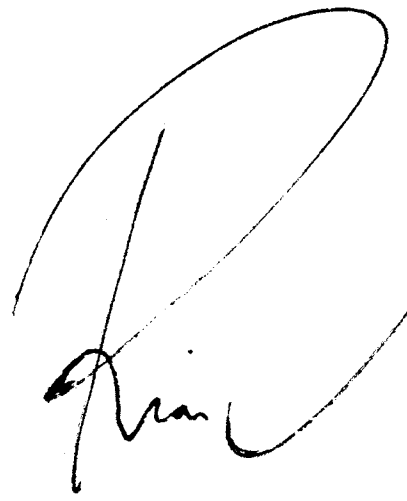
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Johnson

RIAN JOHNSON

The Stages of Emily Doe

Acknowledgments

In order to tell this story properly, I must acknowledge those involved—All those who thread my pain together in the blanket that kept me hidden, to those who poked holes in the blanket's thick wool to let the light hit my face. Some faces I still remember, and others will be burned in my hippocampus until my body meets the ground. It's important to note that without those people who made me experience what hell feels like, I would not be who I am...but it is because of the people that made me see the possibility of heaven that I am still here.

"The Land of the Free" doesn't function without bondage.

I would first like to acknowledge the state of Kentucky. A place that was never meant for colored kids with big dreams and big hair. I would like to acknowledge your ignorance in choosing to live as a confederate state long after The Civil War. You overlooked that Jim Crow died and continued to quietly push black people into too-small enclaves out of ear shot—where our screams overlap one another like the bodies in slave ships. Within these enclaves we have learned how to protect each other but your southern pride is built on being a threat to the enclaves you created. You had a hand in my abuse by making the playing field uneven 400 years ago for my ancestors, brothers, sisters, me, and all of our descendants. Without you, I wouldn't have gone through all that I did...I wouldn't have learned how bad systemic hate could affect me and therefore I would have never found my passion in life. Thank you for choosing to be ignorant so that I could gain knowledge. I would also like to acknowledge the systems in place that made it possible for sexual abuse to thrive in the same environment children grew up in. I remember you the most in moments when I reflect on conversations where girls were always made to be more responsible than the boys that would end up hurting them. You taught us to keep our hands, thoughts, minds, bodies, and pain to ourselves...if we were the owners of vaginas. You taught us that boys can be boys...that the code of conduct for how they played with toys was the same as how they were allowed to play with girls. Reckless, wild, and with no boundaries, you gave them permission to never grow up or think of others and how their actions could affect people and you let them sit in playtime on and off the football field while we were forced to grow up...because

they are boys. Because of you I have the hands of several boys tattooed into my skin and in my brain and for that I can never thank you enough.

While all of this was happening, my father gave me the nickname "diamond." He wanted me to know how a woman, how I, should be treated. It is because of what you put me through and what you made acceptable that I will never forget how a diamond is made, priced, and valued.

Thank you to all of my female classmates who may have suffered the same fate as I and still hide in the night of silence. I want to acknowledge your presence on this earth, for you, too, live. I write for us all. Thank you to the teachers that ignored and overlooked this abuse and all of the perpetrators who perpetuated it. You made survivors. All of you made the pain visceral, but there are beings who made it disappear.

I would like to acknowledge my parents. The two people who made me out of love and have never shown me anything less. Now while you may not have had all the tools to save me from a world with no rules, you loved me enough to guide me while I was temporarily blind. There will never be a love to replace what I have in you. Dad, watching you love Mom in a way that comes as a sacrifice to yourself everyday has made me see that I should never lower myself to chase after the cracks on the sidewalk when I could run with my head held high on streets made of gold. Mom, you are a warrior with armor no one but you can fit. And you still have room to love me in a way that can heal the sick. To my sisters, we have grown up feeling one another's pain as if we shared the same body. We share the same thoughts and burdens. While I may have felt alone, I was never by myself. There is no greater gift than having siblings who are your best friends.

I want to acknowledge the strong Black and Filipino women on my father's side. You taught me what it's like to be bulletproof and still vulnerable. I have learned of the power of duality through watching you. That power now lives in me.

To my Therapist, you encouraged me to speak, and without you this story would have died with me. You are my hero.

To my Alexa, you are an inspiration to me, and to this world. You have inspired me to speak on behalf of the girls who life broke...but you have had a hand in putting me back together. You made this story a broken masterpiece. I will forever be grateful to you.

To my Joel, who loved me before I was aware that love had a definition that applied to me, you gave me a reason to find healing and in you I have found freedom. Thank you for showing me that love should never have a price tag. You are loved by me forever.

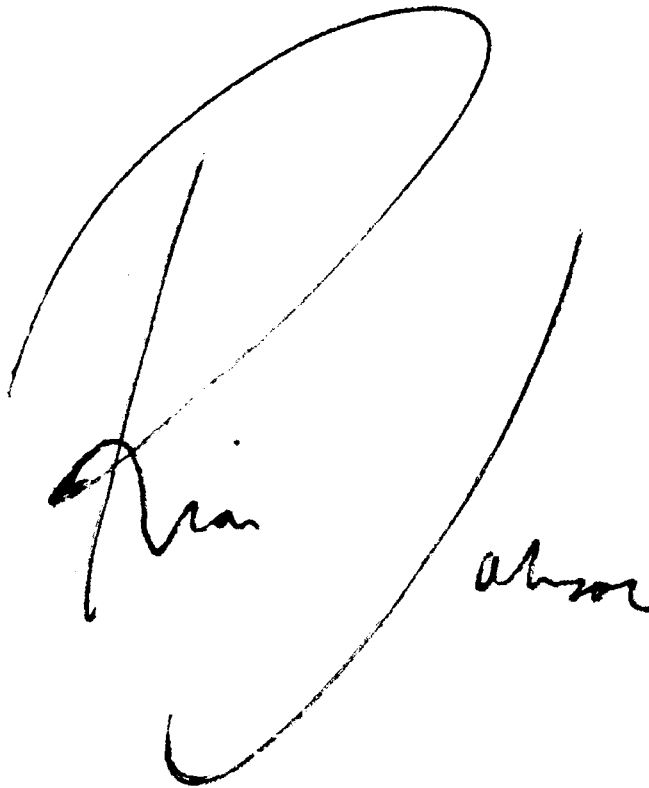
To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, you deserve all of the acknowledgments. You made this journey for me when you crafted me in my mother's womb, and you knew it would come to this moment when it was time to share the journey with others. I used to believe there was a moment in time when you chose to not look at me, in writing this I have been able to feel you in every single moment oxygen fills my lungs. May your will be done with this piece and may the systems that failed me learn from The Pharaoh Ramses.

Let my people go.

(This is an excerpt from a longer piece.)

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A large, stylized handwritten signature, possibly 'Kian', is written in black ink. The signature is enclosed within a large, sweeping loop that starts from the top right and curves around the bottom and left. To the right of the signature, the word 'absor' is written in a smaller, cursive script.

