Excerpts from 'Dispatches from the Front: My Life in NE Portland—diary by JENA RACHEL ROCKWELL (year 08)'

by Smiley McGrouchpants, Jr-Esq-III

4:08 p.m. — 05/03 — Hollywood Library (Sat.)

As usual, the "Quiet Room" brings me peace. I can't believe these things are free! Two hours with no room-mates, no phones ringing, no constant traffic whizzing by outside the window: just seclusion with my books, headphones, pen, paper, and today's Oregonian. And all you have to do is sign your name on a list!

I'm still getting used to the silence. We'll see how this diary thing goes; I've been meaning to keep one, but never had the time — or the reason to, I guess. But with all the complications and constant business in my life lately I've realized I really do need to take a step back and give myself the time (and space) to think: hence, this diary.

Too much to think about to write much today, though. We'll see how much of Saturday's crossword I can conquer in the time I have left and I'll leave off with today's inspirational quote:

"I write in my notebook with feeling that takes me by surprise."

—The Innocence Mission, "Notebook"

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5:00 p.m. — 05/06 — Hollywood Library (Tue.)

Here I am again, out at a table this time (the Quiet Rooms were full). A little more secluded than I would be at the Belmont Branch (near where I used to live) but whatever. Not stuck in the apartment any more, and even if there are people all around me, most of them seem to have things to do, so I can rely on some relative chance of peace. At least it's not a bar!

What am I talking about here! I realize now I'm just babbling. This diary was supposed to be about something, but maybe now I'm realizing I don't really want to talk about all the stuff I'm supposed to be "dealing with" — it's all just stupid bullshit, that other people think is important, for some reason.

Maybe I just need a transitional space — a diary where I talk about seemingly-monotonous things at first — or rather, maybe really are monotonous, but aren't totally annoying bullshit, and therefore constitute a distinct improvement — if only by comparison. If the result is a boring diary, at least that's an "improvement" over the "excitement" of bills, credit card offers, grad school applications, newspaper ads, bus tickets . . .

I'm getting self-righteous here, Dear Reader . . . [hey! wait a second! this is my diary! what are you doing, looking at it, dude! Hit the road! Scram! Vamoose!]

O.K., so obviously I'm tired and paranoid and (apparently) inwardly-jumpy. At least I've vented. And I've filled some pages! (Yay, good job, Jena!) Thank you, thank you . . .

Satisfied my work is done for the day, I'll now turn to the NYT crossword. Good night.

Song of the Day: "The Trouble with Public Places" by Cadallaca

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11:04 p.m. — 05/16 — Some shitty hotel in The Dalles, OR (Fri.)

Well, here I am. Peace and quiet at last. In the Dalles — whatever that is; a name for a town or a thing, like rolling fields of wheat — you know, like "The" something. "The Dalles." I seriously have no idea, nor do I care. I'm away from a lot of shit — and shitty people — so even this crappy motel in this apparently-hick town seems like a haven to me.

Again, no cars whizzing by, no phones ringing off the hook from people wanting right away to have an answer even if they're trying to sell me something, and I don't know how they got my phone number in the first place — whatever.

And, of course, all that shit blowing up in my face which forced me to take flight from Portland and end up here, for the time being Which was not the end result of my blowing things off and having it catch up with me, or for totally not seeing it coming — at least not for the reasons people usually say that, of themselves or about each other. It was more like: "Are you serious? Do you people really have absolutely nothing better to think about, that you're all going to hound me about this and this and this and this?"

Once again I am torn between being unable to decide if I'm being evasive by not writing about it, or decisive by omitting it and therefore proving I refuse to take any of it seriously. How would I explain it to some disinterested third party, anyway? I can't really make sense of it myself. Probably any sane person would think I was crazy myself for not knowing enough about how to sidestep it — and what would I say then? I don't understand this. I know plenty of "normal," cool people who lead productive lives. Why am I a wacko-magnet, for some reason?

Song of the Day: "New Soul" by that Israeli singer, I forget her name

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10:07 a.m. — 11/09 — Hollywood Library (Mon.)

Well, here I am again in the "Quiet Room" again. It appears I've come full circle.

True, it is no longer year 08, but year 09. True, I've jettisoned

most of the baggage that brought me here in the first place, and feel myself such an utterly transformed young woman I sincerely doubt anyone I grew up with would recognize me — or, at least, be confident approaching me.

But: at last, I exist. Awakened, instead of asleep, walking through my days as though I were a pinball, bouncing from one bumper to the next to the ramp to the bell without knowing where it would all lead . . .

Or end . . .

Awake. Alive at 23. (That's not too bad, is it?)

And: I feel pretty, too! Every hair in place, sharp clothes, kickin' glasses.

On to the crossword!

QUOTE OF THE DAY: "You can't always get what you want, but if you try, sometimes, you get what you need." (Rolling Stones)

[TO BE CONTINUED . . .]