Katniss

In the beginning, I imagined myself as Katniss -- young, fearless, subversive. Her treks to Cornucopia became my masked trip to the grocery store. Her fishtail morphed into my box braids. Even her importance transferred to me. She was the protagonist, and naturally, so was I.

I had been preparing for the role practically my entire life. As a teenager in the 2010s, dystopian novels were essentially synonymous with young adult fiction. I devoured *The Hunger Games, Witch and Wizard, Maximum Ride,* and *Divergent.* When we first went on lockdown, I couldn't help but fantasize that I was the young main character here to save the day. I put down the books, ready for the role of a lifetime.

If you were to go on Tik Tok for ten minutes in March you'd see an app full of other twenty-somethings envisioning themselves as the protagonist in a backwards world. In the spring, *The Hunger Games'* dark song "The Hanging Tree," became one of the most popular sounds on the app. Tik Tokers used the song to joke about the similarities between themselves and the main characters in dystopias.

Very much a woman of my generation, I delusionally imagined that the climax of the world's dystopia would be my canceled graduation. My Bachelor's degree conferred to me virtually from my childhood bedroom seemed too tragic not to be. But the event came and went. 100,000 people died. I started my first full time job. Moved to New York. Turned twenty three. The world moved on, unaffected by the plot climax of my youth. The stuff of a supporting character's life.

Eight months later and "The Hanging Tree" is no longer trending on Tik Tok. I have dropped my Katniss fantasies. 100,000 more are dead. The bread baking has stopped. The protagonist wasn't me. It wasn't anyone else either. What was bizarre and apocalyptic is now normal. I am back to reading dystopian novels.

by Jahne Brown

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