



DIRTY CHAI

ISSUE VII | SUMMER 2015

STILL
Logen Cure



STILL HUMAN Logen Cure defines rebellion, dissects our collective desire to revolt, and discusses her forthcoming chapbook

BY ERICA JOY

Examine any piece of art through a certain lens, and you are bound to view it different-

ly: a symphony orchestrated to fit a modern context, a gloomy painting bathed in bright red light, a dancer's relationship between movement and environment. When what you experience as art changes based on how you interact with that art, an entirely new range of ideas, opinions, and emotions is revealed – a variety of viewpoints that may have otherwise gone unexplored.

The pages of Logen Cure's forthcoming chapbook, *Still*, beam with so many basic yet universal themes, but reading her words through the lens of the latest *Dirty Chai* theme offered some unexpected revelations. As I read and reread each of the book's 18 poems, I contemplated human existence in the present state of the world. What does it mean to revolt? How does rebellion manifest? Why are we, as a mortal collective, so drawn toward the very forces we find revolting – those that carry the potential to destroy us?

The driving forces in *Still* stem from Logen's own coming-of-age experiences. Growing up in a conservative town in West Texas, she struggled with her identity for much of her early life.

"I was absolutely trained to accept certain stigmas about being both a woman and queer," Logen says. "I was like... 'I obviously don't fit in, I'm going to have to pretend to be somebody else for a minute' – which I definitely did. And I think a lot of women do pretend to be something else in some way, like dress in a way they don't want to or smile all the time when there's nothing to smile about."

A stanza from *Still*'s opening poem, "Sixth Street," illuminates one of the more prevalent topics in the

work as a whole: How do we discover our true self, and in what ways can we use this discovery to foster healthy relationships with others?

**Then all at once it was clear: all suffering
can be bodily,
anyone who can touch me can make me
not alone.**

“In this case, the speaker’s attempts at authenticity are met with toxic and dangerous results,” Logen explains.

Poems like “Allen” – whose character is much more radical than the speaker – help us visualize the draw to the dangerous element.

**He never stopped at yellow lights.
He taught me how to ash out the window.
He and I had only one thing in common,
but it was the kind of thing that can get two people
pretty damn far: we just couldn’t stand being alone.**

But *why* are we so enthralled by the possibility of danger – the thrill of rebellion?

“I think that’s something we all do to grow up. We set different types of boundaries. And I think we’re drawn to people who do that in more overt or extreme ways than we do,” Logen says, “and that helps us to experience those things – if vicariously, or if by getting yourself involved with people like that. Particularly if you never rebel. If you never try to push those boundaries, you end up being pretty narrow and naïve.”

As we grow, though, we inevitably gain wisdom – as the speaker demonstrates in pieces like “Hometown,” “Residence or Refuge,” and the titular piece, “Still.” We grapple with the understanding that in order to grow into healthy adults, we must learn the art of balance.

“As you grow, you figure out some things about where you come from that are positive and that can be a part of your adult identity in a good way, and you have to figure out the things that do just straight-up hold you back – the ideas you were given that were not ultimately kind and loving toward yourself or others,” says Logen. “I chose *Still* as the title for the book because the collection is concerned with what persists even as we change – our memories, our stories, the ways we are shaped by our origins.”

And how is that tied to rebellion?

“When you rebel, it’s not because you’re unattached to where you come from,” she continues. “I think we’re all tremendously formed by whatever it is we feel the need to rebel against.”

Logen offers these lines from “Hometown” that allude to her Texan heritage:

**I’ve decided I’m the type of person
who wears cowboy boots proudly, and yes,
my decisions have been heartbreaking,**

“That’s something the speaker...can be proud of,” she says. “Not everything about where you come from has to be let go.”

Although everyone deals with these same issues — self-discovery, balance, coming-of-age rebellion — the ways in which we deal are often influenced by factors like family, gender, and location. Some of us internalize our struggles; others are more expressive. For Logen, growing up in the South meant that she had to confront a particular set of expectations.

“There’s a lot of pressure to be a certain kind of person and a certain kind of woman, and I’m not a lot of those things. None of us are really all of those things. For a long time, I just didn’t really have a lot of self-worth. I didn’t require other people to really care about me. So, you can imagine what a terrible mess that eventually becomes — if your standards in relationships are really low, if you don’t require any of your friends or romantic partners to be nice to you,” she says. “I had just accepted all these negative conceptions about myself, my identity — to the point where I let people treat me like I’m not a person. And as soon as I really started to unpack that for myself, everything changed. I lost a lot of friends. A lot of relationships I had started to significantly change because my standards for myself got a lot higher.

“I actually required people to be nice all the time!” she adds, laughing. “I think we’re pretty conditioned to accept a lot of crappy treatment from people — especially as women. You know, we’re told that our bodies are not our own, and that consent is not a thing, and that people can do whatever they want. And if you let people do whatever they want, they’re going to do whatever they want.”

She notes that once she started to address her internalized issues and phobias, she realized she had a lot of power to create boundaries and expectations — and that helped her navigate through the rebellion years and into a healthy adult.

“It’s tremendously challenging to establish and maintain positive relationships, romantic or otherwise. It takes a level of maturity that people don’t reach until they’ve survived all those formative experiences. Letting go of influences that hold you back requires being honest with yourself and others and valuing your own well-being enough to make hard choices,” she says. “It’s hard to be that honest, especially for women — it’s difficult to feel like your feelings and opinions are valid enough, and to not say you’re sorry about it.”

As an academic advisor, Logen talks to college students every day — and she says she’s had to tell many of her female students not to say “I’m sorry” in circumstances that don’t require an apology:

“They’ll start to say, ‘I’m sorry, but I have another question,’ and it’s like, ‘No, this is my job! You don’t have to be sorry for asking me a question.’ And that’s not something that male students do at all.”

During our conversation, I suddenly start to wonder how many times I say “I’m sorry” on any given day (for things I’m not really sorry about), and also how many times I have said to Logen, “Oh, I’m

“And I think, too, that the apology is a real and serious and important thing that you should be able to do when you need to, when you truly need to apologize to somebody. Because that’s also really difficult—to own up to whatever you’ve done,” she says. “When you are *trained to be sorry for having a question, or voicing an opinion*, then yeah, it’s really hard to be honest enough about your feelings to have positive relationships.”

sorry, but I have another question.”

Logen admits that she apologizes unnecessarily, too, like when someone runs in to her in public and she automatically lets out an “I’m sorry.”

“And I think, too, that the apology is a real and serious and important thing that you should be able to do when you need to, when you truly need to apologize to somebody. Because that’s also really difficult—to own up to whatever you’ve done,” she says. “When you are *trained to be sorry for having a question, or voicing an opinion*, then yeah, it’s really hard to be honest enough about your feelings to have positive relationships.”

Still concludes with a surprising handful of poems that leave the reader feeling hopeful—almost at peace with life’s struggles. Among them? One of my favorite lines from “This is not my first grey hair,” a poem that challenges an idea I’ve been thinking about a lot lately: that as much as I enjoy being alone, we are not actually designed to be alone forever. We are meant to find another who complements us so that instead of rebelling against age, we can embrace it.

**Though I admit I liked that bathroom mirror,
simply because we could stand in front of it together,
and I found it easier to look at myself
when I could see you, too.**

“While the struggle is real and messy and inevitable, all those risky decisions can lead to a better life,” Logen says, and I get the feeling this resonates with her personally as well as with the speaker of *Still*. “Being the type of person that is open to different types of experiences, even if they are risky, is just useful for you in a human sense. If you don’t risk anything, you don’t gain anything.”

In addition to an exploration of coming-of-age rebellion, *Still* offers some very human insight on how we are shaped by the relationships and experiences of our younger years. It’s as much about growing up as it is about getting old, from hanging on to letting go, what exists between the fervor of attraction and the silence of standing still—and how to rebuild ourselves with what is left when things fall apart. •

Still is forthcoming from *Finishing Line Press* and will be officially released on September 11, 2015. Visit finishinglinepress.com to learn more, and spread the word on social media with the tag #StillLogenCure.