

miniMAG

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fever



ARE YOU A NICE GIRL OR A CUNT?

Caitlin Andrews

“Where such men love, they have no desire, and where they desire,
they cannot love.”

...

Six months ago, I watched *Saturday Night Fever* for the first time, and though it did trigger some cross-generational questions in me (like, “Do I want to get mid-70s John Travolta out of his clothes to see him naked, or do I just want to steal his clothes?”), it also occurred to me that, as a smug little Gen-Z, my viewpoint is probably very different from that of the cool cats and kittens who rolled into the original 1977 screening on their tangerine roller skates. *Saturday Night Fever* is one of the greats. Little kids still bang on their dying parents’ chests to the sound of “Staying Alive,” purely as a result of the cultural renaissance that came from giving John Travolta a dagger-collared shirt and a packet of hair gel. If *Grease* made waves for widening the “Good Girl, Bad Girl” stereotypes in a culturally relevant way for women, then *Saturday Night Fever* is its teenage-boy equivalent, set in a slightly later time period and considerably more salaciously. But much like other interests predominantly held by teenage boys, it unfortunately contains a seedy underbelly (... or rather, backseat).

For those who’ve never seen *Saturday Night Fever*, the plot is this: There’s an Italian-American kid named Tony who wears Goblin King-

level crotch-hugging trousers and has an entourage of equally greasy male friends, most of whom struggle with menial tasks, like wearing condoms and hobbling around in their four-inch platforms. Tony, being a young, handsome guy in '70s Brooklyn, is legally obligated to boogie-on-down to the sound of the Bee Gees every weekend, which he is (admittedly) very fucking good at doing. John Travolta can dance, man. Anyway, after a lot of smoking, cussing, and flirting with a young, cute Fran Drescher—a woman I could not imagine being better suited to play Travolta's discothèque squeeze in this cultural context—Tony stumbles upon a woman named Stephanie at the club. She's a good dancer, so he ignores the fact that she's overdoing the "aloof female love interest" routine and pursues her until she agrees to enter a dancing competition with him. This feels like a win for Tony. Many of the film's central concepts surround the notions of masculinity and working-class identity, so by giving him an opportunity to escape the violence and machismo of the culture he grew up in, it's easy to give in to the hope that by the end of the movie, he'll be less of a misogynistic asshole. Unfortunately, that's not what happens.

As the film progresses, the tone gets significantly darker, and a series of disturbing events occur in quick succession. One of Tony's friends is attacked by a person whom they mistakenly assume to be a member of the Barracudas, a neighbouring Puerto Rican gang, and so they decide to crash their car into the window of the gang's hideout as an act of revenge. Bobby C, another of Tony's friends, played by the curly-headed comedian kid from Fame, gets his girlfriend pregnant and laments the fact that he can't ask her to get an abortion due to her devout Catholic beliefs. And Tony stands by as he watches his former dance partner, Annette, who is exasperatingly in love with him, get gang-raped in a car by his friends, even going so far as to refer to her as a "cunt" afterwards as part of the never-ending "Are you a nice girl or a cunt?" Madonna-whore dichotomy. But most importantly, and crucially to the dysfunction of Tony's perceived character arc, Tony is not just a witness to all of this hardship. Twenty minutes before the end of the movie—well into the average "come-to-Jesus" denouement for a film with such a spectacularly reprehensible main character—Tony attempts to rape Stephanie in the back of a car.

Yes. The handsome, flashy (bordering on camp), shallowly enviable protagonist who decades of real-life men have since come to try and



emulate—though, thankfully, without shaving off their sideburns—actively attempted to rape his love interest at the post-climax point of his so-called character development, but if you ask any middle-aged man (or any of the community of young, hot-toxic “He’s just like me” men who have adapted *Saturday Night Fever*, *Fight Club*, and *American Psycho* into their cultural repertoire), they’ll probably describe the film as:

“Good dancing. Nice lights. Flares. Bee Gees. Birth of mainstream disco. New York-Italian macho men. What I imagine I look like when I walk down the street.”

I’m not necessarily shocked or even critical of this perspective, in the same way I think it would be naive to watch *Pulp Fiction* and say, “I can’t believe this Tarantino movie has violence in it.” Upon watching a film released in a different era, there’s an obligation to remove your “modern woman” glasses and immerse yourself in the perspectives of the would-be rapists rather than the would-be rapees, in order to try and understand the men who grew up in a context that more concretely valued violence as masculinity and sexual assault as macho. But I do think being able to witness *Saturday Night Fever* in the culture it was born in and the culture I was born in bodes something interesting for intergenerational media literacy.

The main thing that throws me off about *Saturday Night Fever* is the fact that, due to the decade it was released in and its subsequent cultural sentimentalism, I can’t tell if Tony’s character was intended to be perceived by the viewer as a “rapist.” Consciously, I know that physically restraining another person under the threat of sexual assault, at the very least, puts you into the Bad Man Camp. But in 1974, when marital rape was legal (or partially legal) in every American state and the Ramones couldn’t release a track without a sex-infused “Hey, little girl” lyric, how much abuse could be swept under the rug under the guise of “masculinity”? Did Norman Wexler, the writer of *Saturday Night Fever*, intend for Tony’s character to be a predator—and therefore, presumably, pretty difficult to redeem—or was that characteristic something that showed up in the afterimages, like blobs on a Polaroid?

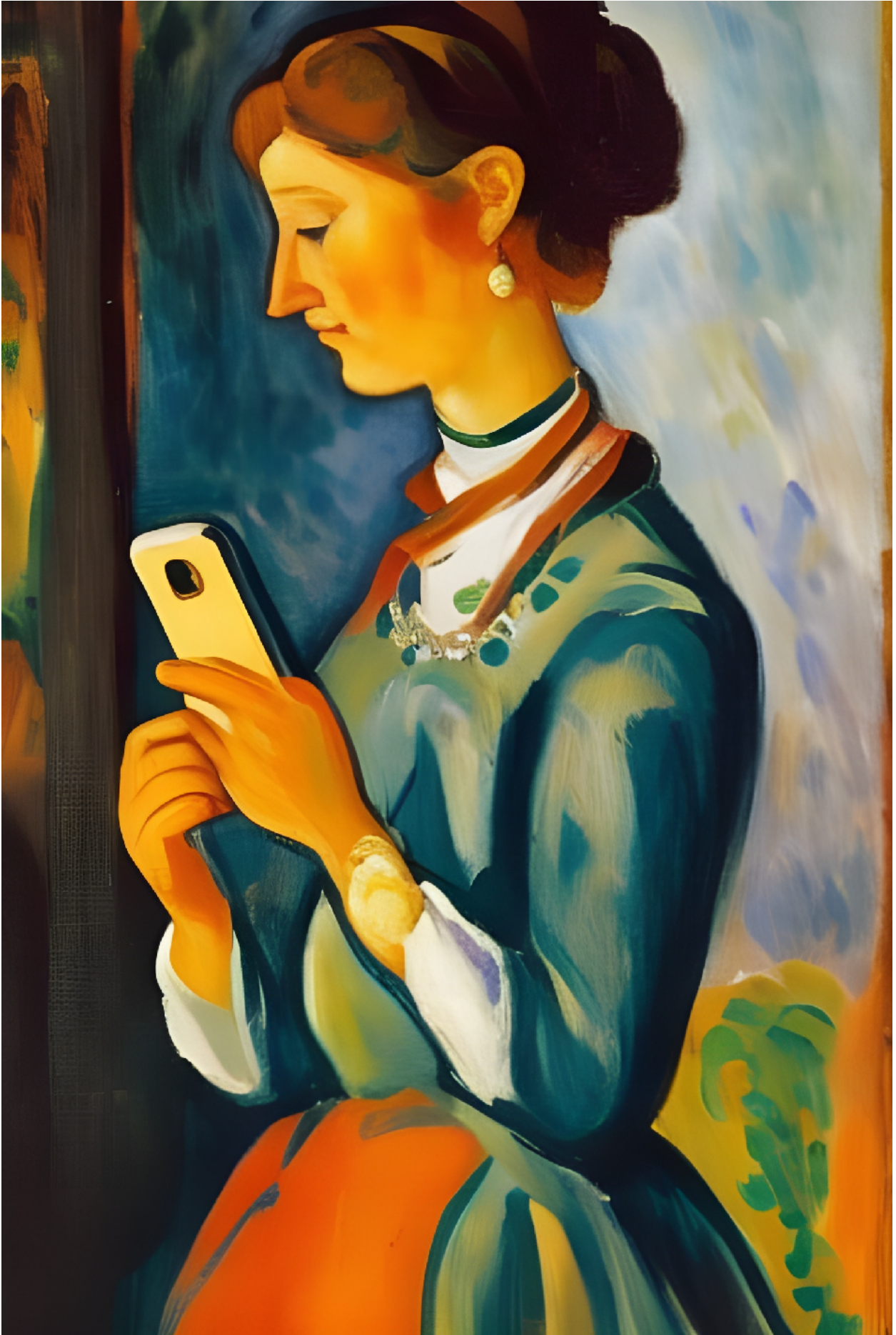
After all, the two defining moments in the film that shook up Tony’s worldview had almost nothing to do with his maltreatment of women.

The first was when he realised he had won the dance competition with Stephanie because he was white rather than because he was the best dancer (in comparison to a pair of notably superior Puerto Rican contestants), and the second was when his friend Bobby C jumped off the Verrazzano Bridge, inadvertently committing suicide, to escape his aforementioned pregnant Catholic girlfriend and the isolation that came from the absence of male bonding. Sure, Tony might deserve a little credit for his behaviour in the former, in that he handed the dance trophy to the Puerto Rican contestants instead of taking the glory for himself (albeit right before attempting to rape Stephanie out of rage). But in a film trying to make a statement about why “machismo” is harmful to men, is a man jumping off a bridge because he got a woman pregnant really the most empathic example? How can the premise of working in a paint shop, being married to a person you don’t love, or even acknowledging the dead-end nature of your existence be the focus point for the audience’s empathy when there are women doing all of those things on top of being raped, getting pregnant, and being called cunts?

In the end, Tony is acquitted of his crimes. He forces his way through Stephanie’s door and is almost immediately forgiven by her (and by default, the audience, given the film’s looming credits), en route to their new relationship as “friends.” There is no conversation about whether or not a man who abuses women—even if it is the result of a cultural scourge that pressures him to be “macho”—deserves to be redeemed or deserves to escape from the social microcosm that made him sick. There is only the lingering message that as long as you’re troubled enough to warrant blaming “society,” any behaviour that entombs your pain in women is acceptable. Yet again, it is the “nice girls” and “cunts” who suffer.

...

“It’s a fine line between Saturday night and Sunday morning.”



21st Century Girlhood

A. I. Duckett

Sally Hansen white nail polish always chips too soon

Keep the braids in overnight for best results

If they ask which boy you're in love with (because there always has to be one)

Say your heart belongs to your pet rabbit and your college application

雙城誌

Tim Yiu

窸窣窸窣中執愛情的定義

噪噪切切

回南天不關法租界的冷雨

若生命中有不能承受之輕

定是卡列寧吠的最後一聲

是Chet Baker拈拈蒂嫵

是你喙嚙French Yogo

是年青的手借火

或是借penis

或pussy

一拂前世交戰的靈魂

互咕囁

何抱怨？

淮海中路大平層豪華外賣lunch

冠冕操粵語的淳於棼兒

河南，

馬蹄蓮陪塑著向南的樹蔭

貓礙凝它頭上的兩盅龕

道：

「一起生長」

「La-dee-da」



Unbearable Heat

unbearable heat
cold apples sweat
in the bowl

Christina Chin

coring and filling them

Linda Ludwig

a small fan turns
near the stove

M. R. Defibaugh

Hunch

for Oskar Kokascha

How do you be long and dead?
is it in laying with your lovers? Seeing yourself in
one, then double? The answer ends with: a gritty self-portrait
and taking off your fingers, lost.

Aaliyah Anderson

Lotus

i am not your lotus blossom,
unfurling open for
foreign men in combat
uniform. easy as oriental
stream. left, too, polluted
after the war is over.

Isabella Forteleza-Tan

loose change

Livvy Krakower

kelly was born with the feeling that she would be the victim of a tragic and
bizarre accident she would later discover that this feeling is genetic
sucking on loose change
a piggy bank of a stomach
kelly swallows an entire roll of nickels
stays up all night twisting and turning her body
gaga

kesha

nicki minaj

headphones in her blue ipod touch

nickels clinking together as she moves her hips

skinny and delusional

the greatest combo that she didn't know she possessed yet

when the coins finally rests in the lining of her stomach

kelly pukes silently to the sound of paparazzi

smelling the vomit in her sleep

her mother does not bother to wake up



the shape of jazz to come

Hark Herald

lonely woman
rocket silo
bleeding sound
napa wine
camden town

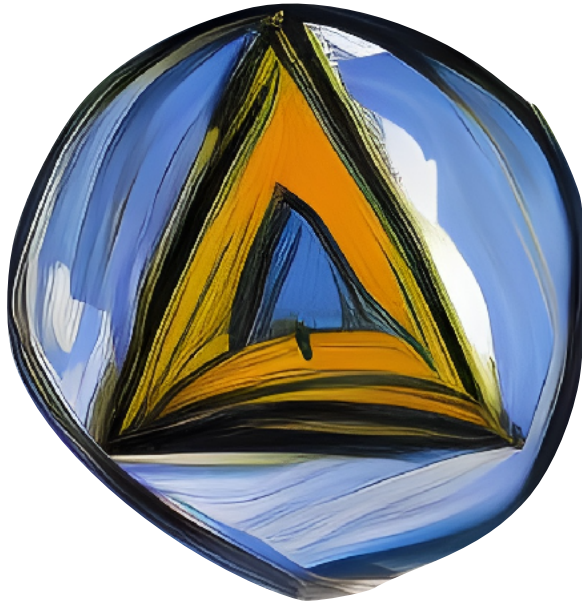
eventually
five minutes of rain
outdoes fifty fire fighters

peace
pipes shuddering leaking hot
like mange dog
peace
meat spittering crying
against the skillet
peace
descends slowly
like a meteor
too much is a little more than usual

"focus on sanity,"
mom called to say
outside, the garden heaves with life
in another life i was an air-to-earth missile
very briefly
blast furnace that nothing hid from
very briefly
patron saint of semtex
under every government building
heaven helps
in its own little way

congeniality
is evicted from the body
before the final foreclosure

chronology
means
cups of tea are a clock
a clock a clock a clock
a bit of sipping trite
a bit of nothing every day
feels about right
dream the pipe
dream American
leave the tv on and go to work
air out the flat with windows wide
drink cold beer
in the sunshine
vibrant inner lives of strangers
just mud on bootheels
just glowing pains and
the honey dug
out from my lissome neck
with thick trowels
in another life
i worked for the government
and did nothing for love
nothing for
that flagrant face of yours
twinkhon headshot
my body in a subaru impreza
shut up and kiss
kitchen sink piss
lets pray before we eat
just this once



url: minimag.space
subs: minimagsubmissions@gmail.com
twitter: @minimag_lit

“Are You a Nice Girl or a Cunt?” by Caitlin Andrews
Linktree: https://linktr.ee/caitlin_andrews
Portfolio: <https://caitlinandrewscont.wixsite.com/portfolio>

“21st Century Girlhood” by A. I. Duckett

“雙城誌” by Tim Yiu
微信 Official Account: Tim Yiu
Insta: @timyiumusic
Twitter: @timyiumusic

“Unbearable Heat” collaborative poem by
Christina Chin, Linda Ludwig, and M. R. Defibaugh
Christina Chin
Twitter: @Christina_haiku
Insta: @Christina_zygby22
Websites: <https://haikuzyg.blogspot.com/>
<https://christinachin99blog.wordpress.com/>
Chapbook: <https://ko-fi.com/s/0f986abc30>

“Hunch” by Aaliyah Anderson

“Lotus” by Isabelle Fortaleza-Tan

“loose change” by Livvy Krakower
Insta: @littlepenguinswrite

“the shape of jazz to come” by Hark Herald
Website:
<https://forms.gle/ja5DS67986R51z8N8>

edited and AI art (created at NightCafe Studio)
by Alex Prestia